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# **Characteristics and Delivery of Early Childhood Education Degrees in Australia**

## **PART A**

Final Report

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# Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms .....	4
Acknowledgments .....	6
Executive Summary .....	7
Introduction.....	11
1 Characteristics of Early childhood education degrees .....	12
Early Childhood Education courses (Birth to Five years) .....	12
Early Childhood Education courses (Birth to Eight years).....	14
Early Exit qualifications models .....	19
Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities .....	20
Summary.....	22
2 Preparing the Early Childhood Teacher .....	24
Early Childhood Teacher Preparation .....	24
Career outcomes.....	25
Professional standards.....	28
Registration and Accreditation Authorities .....	29
Summary.....	33
3 Trends in Early Childhood course delivery.....	35
Case Studies.....	36
Discussion .....	46
Summary.....	47
Conclusion .....	49
References .....	50

# Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACU	Australian Catholic University
Adv.	Advanced
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
B.	Bachelor
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CHC	Christian Heritage College
CQU	Central Queensland University
CSU	Charles Sturt University
Dip.	Diploma
EC	Early Childhood
ECA	Early Childhood Australia
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECES	Early Childhood Education Studies
ECS	Early Childhood Studies
ECU	Edith Cowan University
Ed.	Education
Ext.	External
Grad.	Graduate
HE	Higher Education
JCU	James Cook University
Int.	Intervention
Learn. Mgt.	Learning Management
MWEI	Montessori World Educational Institute
N/A	Not Applicable
NCAC	National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.
ND	Notre Dame
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SCU	Southern Cross University
Spec.	Specialisation
Teach.	Teaching
UC	University of Canberra
UniSA	University of South Australia
UNE	University of New England

USC	University of the Sunshine Coast
USQ	University of Southern Queensland
UWS	University of Western Sydney

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# Executive Summary

In Australia and throughout the world, research has demonstrated that high quality early childhood programs tend to produce enhanced cognitive, language and social development, particularly among children from disadvantaged social backgrounds. Early childhood education is a dynamic field characterised by innovation and change. This report identifies the array of courses now available to prepare the Early Childhood teacher in Australian higher education institutions, and the way in which institutions are changing their course delivery to better meet the needs of a diverse range of students.

## Characteristics of Early Childhood Education Degrees

An Early Childhood Education Degree is defined as a program of study that qualifies graduates to teach groups of children between the ages of birth and eight years. Our study was confined to courses offered by higher education institutions and therefore excluded courses offered below Bachelor's level (ie. VET Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas), while including Associate Degrees (that are the HE equivalent of an Advanced Diploma in VET) and HE Diplomas. We identify at least 90 courses that meet these criteria.

Early Childhood degrees usually prepare graduates to work with:

- babies and toddlers (0-3 years);
- 4 year-old children in pre-schools (also called kindergartens in some states);
- 5 year-olds in pre-Year 1 settings (also called kindergarten or preparatory classes);
- 5-8 year-olds in Years 1 and 2 at school.

As many Early Childhood Education graduates work in primary schools, some ECE degrees also provide students with the skills to teach at both the ECE and the primary school level and therefore cover the age range of birth to 12 years. Nevertheless, the accepted definition of Early Childhood Education is that it extends from birth to eight years. Some Early childhood education courses are not accredited with Teacher Education and Registration authorities so their graduates are not permitted to teach in schools. While these courses are identified as 0-5 years in terms of coverage, their curriculum usually mirrors the standard Early childhood education definition of 0-8 years, but lacks the school-specific content required by the Teacher registration authorities.

All jurisdictions except the ACT now have teacher registration and accreditation authorities with which teachers must be registered before they are permitted to teach in schools. These authorities have automatic jurisdiction over the employment of Early childhood education teachers in schools. However, the arrangements for funding and regulating pre-school provision for 4-year olds varies between states and territories, and between types of providers. There is no national consistency in the qualifications required of pre-school teachers and carers who are responsible for 4-year olds before they begin school.

Students who possess prior qualifications such as a Diploma of Children’s Services may be awarded advanced standing of up to two years towards a four-year Early childhood education degree. The amount of advanced standing offered varies considerably between courses and many institutions make assessments on an individual basis.

A number of Early childhood education Degree programs are targeted to specific groups of students, such as holders of VET Diplomas or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who hold Certificates in education-related work. Customised programs use different modes of delivery to best meet the needs of their target groups. For example, many courses targeted to holders of VET Diplomas are offered part-time and externally so that the students can remain in the workforce while undertaking the degree. Some institutions offer programs targeted to Indigenous people working in education through multi-campus delivery in regional and remote locations. Others provide units of study in block residential mode.

It is increasingly common for Early childhood education degree programs to have a number of qualifications embedded within them. These “early exit” models typically offer: a Certificate awarded after one year of study; a Diploma awarded after two years of study; and a 3-year degree awarded upon completion of the third year of study, that would qualify the graduate to work in pre-schools and childcare (0-5 years). While many early exit models end after three years, some offer a fourth year of the degree that results in a teaching qualification recognised for teaching the early years of primary school. One reason for embedding early exit awards within degree programs is to increase the employment options for students as they are completing the 4-year qualification. The students may be able to use the preliminary qualifications to continue working and studying, or take a break from study to work full-time and re-enter the program at a later stage. A second use of early exit qualifications is to facilitate the departure of less successful students from 4-year degree courses, while still providing them with a lower-level qualification. In these circumstances, universities would not offer the graduate a re-entry point to the course.

## Preparing the Early childhood education teacher

An Early childhood education teacher is an education professional who supports and facilitates the development of young children from the ages of birth to eight years. Early childhood education teachers recognise that children’s learning occurs from birth, rather than from when they enter formal schooling. Research suggests that the provision of high quality early childhood education programs can contribute significantly to reducing disparities in children’s learning and development, and contribute positively to the long-term outcomes of formal schooling.

The primary work of an Early childhood education teacher is to facilitate the social, physical, cognitive and emotional development of young children. A skilled Early childhood education teacher should be able to design and implement programs of learning that meet the developmental needs of children from the ages of birth to eight years. Early childhood education is a distinct pedagogical field with an emphasis on child-centred learning.

There are many influences on the work of Early childhood education teachers in Australia. While there are currently no national professional standards for the Early childhood education teacher, their work is defined by:

- a *Code of Ethics* produced by Early Childhood Australia; and
- the 33 standards of provision defined for childcare providers under the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System*, issued by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.

The Federal government is currently developing a national Early Years Learning Framework that will apply to all children from birth to eight years and to all early childhood services. The Framework will recognise the importance of play-based learning, communication and language, including early literacy and numeracy, as well as emotional and social development. It will set out the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age as well as their transition to school.

The role of Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities in accrediting teacher preparation courses is having an influence on Early Childhood Education and there is a need to balance the authorities' need for curriculum-based studies with the unique pedagogical demands of Early Childhood Education. It is important to acknowledge and respect the concept of a pedagogical framework for early childhood education from birth to eight years.

## Trends in Early childhood education course delivery

Many higher education institutions are developing new approaches to the delivery of Early Childhood Education degrees to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The programs vary considerably in detail, but all have the common feature of enhancing pathways, both into and out of, courses in Early Childhood Education. Programs are now offered externally and through multiple campuses, and are designed with multiple entry and exit points, as part of a specific strategy to meet the needs of targeted groups, such as students holding VET Diplomas who are working in childcare and Indigenous students.

This review examined the courses and identifies three emerging trends in the areas of:

- Standardised Curriculum design;
- Student-centred course design; and
- New delivery modes.

*Curriculum design* is increasingly influenced by Teacher Education and Accreditation Authorities who have a responsibility to ensure that the unique features of Early childhood education pedagogy (0-8 years) are recognised and included in courses that involve teaching in the early years of primary school. Currently the curricula offered by various institutions, falls into four broad areas:

- Education studies (including, for example, child development and units on diversity/inclusion)
- Curriculum studies, including, for example, play-based learning in the early years, but also the key learning areas mandated by State education authorities

- Professional care and management studies (for example, working with families)
- Professional experience (practicum).

*Student-centred course design* has led to the development of courses that offer integrated ‘on-ramps’ and ‘early exit’ points into and through, Early childhood education degree programs. These various pathways allow these institutions to better cater to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, such as Indigenous students and students entering the program with a VET Diploma in Children’s Services. We identify three distinct pathways models, while illustrating how some institutions combine two or three of these models in developing their student-centred programs:

- A multi-campus course with different entry requirements and delivery modes designed to cater to students who are geographically dispersed;
- An on-campus course with several pathways courses leading into it and multiple early exit points; and
- An external course designed to meet the needs of a specific group of students.

*New delivery modes* are being used to target courses to groups of students who differ from the mainstream intake of Year 12 graduates. Diverse student groups are being given more access to Early childhood education courses through targeted external courses, and courses delivered on multi-campus locations, particularly education facilities in remote and regional communities. Institutions are also offering block residential units of study to students from remote areas. While these programs promote increased access to degree programs, they require higher levels of resourcing and institutions report difficulties in staffing multi-campus programs with qualified personnel. Participation and success rates among students in remotely delivered programs for Indigenous students are reported to be poor.

# Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations as part of the development of a National Early Years Workforce Strategy to improve recruitment and retention of the early childhood workforce, develop pathways that reward and support the best workers and raise the level of qualifications.

To contribute to the evidence base for the Strategy, the authors were asked to map the characteristics of early childhood degree courses in Australian Higher Education and examine how the delivery of courses differed between institutions and jurisdictions.

This project builds on a previous work, *Pathways to a Profession*, published in 2006, and aims to increase understanding of the range of tertiary pathways available to students in Early Childhood studies in Australian Higher Education.

The required outcomes of the study were to provide a comprehensive report to:

- map the characteristics of early childhood degree courses in Australia (including duration, delivery modes, a broad overview of content, and practicum (including lengths);
- outline the relationship between each course and the teacher registration requirements in the provider's jurisdiction and other jurisdictions (ie. are graduates from each course eligible to work and/or be registered in preschools and long day care in all states and territories?);
- identify and document any special provisions that promote access (including through remote and /or external delivery, customisation of courses, conversion courses);
- identify any course content that extends beyond education (such as health);
- identify, in consultation with the Department, a minimum of three early childhood degrees for detailed case study, which illustrate typical forms of course provision and which also highlight differences in forms of provision.
- Identify and document in broad terms what early childhood teachers should know and be able to do, including professional standards and registration requirements.

# 1 Characteristics of Early childhood education degrees

Most Australian universities offer teacher education courses and many of these programs have early childhood specialisations within them. For the purposes of this report, we define an Early Childhood Degree as a program of study that qualifies graduates to teach groups of children between the ages of birth and eight years.

Our study was confined to courses offered by higher education institutions and therefore excluded courses offered by the VET sector such as VET Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in Children's Services. We have reported on Associate Degrees (that are the HE equivalent of an Advanced Diploma in VET) and on some HE Diplomas as well as some access courses specific to education.

We identify at least 90 courses that meet these criteria offered in 35 higher education institutions across all Australian states and territories. A detailed summary of each program is provided in Part B of this report.

## **Early Childhood Education courses (Birth to Five years)**

There are 29 programs of study offered in the Early Childhood field that prepare students to teach children from Birth to Five Years offered at both the undergraduate and post-graduate level. The majority of these programs are undergraduate courses involving three years of equivalent full-time study. Many of the institutions providing Birth to Five Years programs provide explicit pathways from these programs to further study towards a recognised school teaching qualification. The courses serve different purposes and are listed in Table 1.

All of the undergraduate programs in Table 1 involve three years of equivalent full-time study, except for a four year degree at CSU and the programs at Wollongong and Deakin Universities. The *Diploma in Education (Anangu Education)* by the University of South Australia is the only 2-year program of study identified for Birth to Five Years.

In general, four year undergraduate programs offered in Early Childhood Education provide graduates with an accredited primary school teaching qualification (ie. pre-primary to Year 2) and these programs are listed in Table 2 in the following section. The programs listed in Table 1 equip students to teach at the pre-school level and below.

The majority of programs for the Birth to Five Years age group offer students up to two years credit for previous qualifications such as a VET Diploma/Advanced Diploma in Children's Services (Childcare). Some institutions state explicitly how much credit will be granted for VET qualifications, and the amount offered for a VET Diploma in Children's Services (Childcare) is indicated in the final column of Table 1. Other institutions indicate that they will provide credit for previous study on a case-by-case basis. Some institutions provide additional resources to assist students holding VET Diplomas and these strategies are discussed in subsequent sections of the report.

Table 1 Early Childhood Education Courses (Birth to Five Years)

Juris-diction	Institution	Title	No. of Yrs ( f/t)	Type	Credit for VET Dip. (yrs)
NAT	ACU	B. Teaching (Early Childhood)	3.0	U/G	
NAT	ACU	Assoc. Degree in ECE	2.0	U/G	
NSW	CSU	B. Teaching (Birth to 5 years) Grad. entry (VET)	3.0	U/G	2.0
NSW	CSU	B. Education (Birth to 5 years)	4.0	U/G	2.0
NSW	Macquarie	Grad Dip Ed (ECE in 0-5 settings)	1.0	P/G	
NSW	Macquarie	Grad Dip Ed (ECE and Int. in 0-5 settings)	1.0	P/G	
NSW	Macquarie	Grad Dip Ed (Advanced Studies in EC)	1.0	P/G	
NSW	Macquarie	B. Teaching (Birth to School Age)	3.0	U/G	0.5
NSW	Macquarie	B. Teaching (Early Childhood Services)	3.0	U/G	1.0
NSW	UNE	B. Teaching (ECE)	3.0	U/G	2.0
NSW	Newcastle	Bachelor of Early Childhood Teaching	3.0	U/G	1.0
NSW	Newcastle	Grad. Cert. Educational Studies (currently inactive)	0.5	PG	
NSW	Uni Sydney	M. Teach + B. Teach (Grad. Entry) EC	2.0	P/G	
NSW	Uni Sydney	B. Teach (Grad. Entry) EC (0-5)	1.5	U/G	
NSW	UWS	B. EC Studies (Child and Family)	3.0	U/G	1.5
NSW	UWS	Grad. Dip. Educational Studies (EC)	1.0	P/G	
NSW	Woll.	B. Ed.: The Early Years (0-5) & Honours	4.0	U/G	
NT	Batchelor	B. Teaching (Early Childhood)	3.0	U/G	
NT	CDU	B. Children's Services	3.0	U/G	2.0
QLD	QUT	B. Early Childhood Studies	3.0	U/G	1.0
QLD	USQ	B. Early Childhood	3.0	U/G	1.0
SA	Uni. SA	Dip. Education (Anangu)	2.0	U/G	
TAS	Tasmania	B. Education and Care (Early Years)	3.0	U/G	1.0
VIC	Deakin	B. ECE and Honours	4.0	U/G	2.0
VIC	Melbourne	Grad. Dip. Teach. (Early Childhood/Early years)	1.5	P/G	
VIC	Monash	B. Early Childhood Studies	3.0	U/G	1.0
VIC	Monash	Grad. Dip Education (Early Childhood)	1.0	P/G	
VIC	Ballarat	B. Teach. (Early Childhood Education)	3.0	U/G	1.5
WA	ECU	Grad. Cert. Education (ECES)	0.5	P/G	

### Pathways from ECE (birth to 5 years) to primary school teaching

Recognising that pre-school teachers may wish to progress to early childhood teaching in primary schools, many of the Birth to Five Years courses provide an explicit pathway to a primary teaching qualification. This can involve between one and two years' additional study, depending on the courses offered by the institution. The institutions that advertise an explicit pathway to a school teaching qualification on their websites include:

- ACU's *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood)* is offered as an exit degree from the *Bachelor of Education (EC and Primary)* in Ballarat and Melbourne (VIC);
- UNE's *Bachelor of Teaching (ECE)* is an early exit point offered within a four-year Bachelor of Education (ECE) degree;
- Both the UWS *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)* and *Graduate Diploma of Educational Studies (EC)* are a pathway to the UWS *Master of Teaching Degree* (involving a further 1.5 years' study);

- Batchelor Institute’s *Bachelor of Teaching (EC)* is the third exit point offered within a four-year *Bachelor of Education (EC)* offered to Indigenous students;
- Graduates of CDU’s *Bachelor of Children’s Services* degree may seek admission into the *Graduate Diploma of Teaching and Learning* which is a recognised teaching qualification in the NT;
- QUT’s *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies* is an exit point from the four-year *Bachelor of Education (EC)* degree;
- University of South Australia’s *Diploma in Education (Anangu Education)* articulates into a *Bachelor of Teaching (Anangu Education)* which qualifies to teach in Anangu primary schools;
- University of Tasmania’s *Bachelor of Education and Care (Early Years)* is a pathway to a two-year *Bachelor of Education* degree; and
- Graduates of University of Ballarat’s *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)* can progress to the *Diploma of Education (Primary)* to gain a four-year teaching qualification.

The Monash University *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies* does not articulate into a four-year teaching degree, but we were advised that some students transfer to the four-year Bachelor of Education program during the first year of the Early Childhood Studies degree.

## Postgraduate Programs

The postgraduate programs for Birth to Five Years serve two purposes. In general, postgraduate courses in Early Childhood are for graduates who already hold a teaching degree but want an Early Childhood specialisation. The courses that serve this purpose include:

- The three *Graduate Diplomas* offered by Macquarie University;
- Monash University’s *Graduate Diploma of Education (Early Childhood)*; and
- ECU’s *Graduate Certificate of Education (ECES)*.

The second purpose is to provide a specialisation for graduates with a degree in a discipline other than teaching (such as social work or community development). The University of Sydney’s *Master of Teaching* and *Bachelor of Teaching* Programs in Early Childhood are designed for graduates with a first degree in any discipline.

## Early Childhood Education courses (Birth to Eight years)

Programs that equip students to teach in primary schools as well as in the early childhood sector are normally a four-year undergraduate Bachelor’s degree with an early childhood specialisation. The courses which fall into this category are shown in Table 2.

All of the programs listed in Table 2 involve four years of full-time study except for a 5 year program at QUT and a 3-year program for Anangu Education at UniSA. Most of the undergraduate programs qualify graduates to teach children from birth to eight years of age but some nominate birth to 12 years of age. While technically, a graduate with a degree focusing on the Birth to Eight Years age group is eligible to work in childcare centres, pre-schools and primary schools up to grade two, in practice, once registered as a primary school teacher, these graduates may end up teaching throughout the primary school years.

Table 2 Undergraduate Early Childhood Education Courses (Birth to Eight Years)

Jurisdiction	Institution	Title	Age	Credit for VET Dip. (yrs)
NAT	ACU	B. Education (EC & Primary)	3-8	1.0
NAT	ND NSW	B. Education (EC)	0-12	
NAT	ND WA	B. Education (EC)	3-8	
ACT	UC	B. Education (ECT) 3-8 years	3-8	
ACT	UC	B. Education (ECT)	0-8	
NSW	Avondale	B. Education (EC)	0-8	1.0
NSW	CSU	B. Education (EC & Primary)	0-12	
NSW	Macquarie	B. Education (ECE) & Honours	0-8	1.0
NSW	SCU	B. Education (EC)	0-8	0.5
NSW	UNE	B. Education (ECE)	0-8	2.0
NSW	Newcastle	B. Education(EC)	0-8	1.0
NSW	Wollongong	B. ECE & Honours	0-8	1.0
NT	Batchelor	B. Education (Early Childhood)	0-8	
NT	CDU	B. Teach. and Learning (pre-service) (EC)	0-8	1.0
QLD	CQU	B. Learning Management (EC)	3-12	1.0
QLD	CHC	B. Education (Primary/Early years)	3-8	
QLD	Griffith	B. Education (Primary) EC Specialisation	3-12	
QLD	Griffith	B. Human Services (Child and Family Studies) / Grad. Dip. Education (Primary)	0-12	
QLD	JCU	B. Education (EC)	0-8	
QLD	QUT	B. Education (EC)	0-8	
QLD	QUT	B. Ed. (Pre-service EC) *5 yrs EFT.	0-8	1.5
QLD	USQ	B. Education (EC) & Honours	0-8	1.0
SA	Uni. SA	B. ECE (Magill Campus) & Honours	0-8	1.0
SA	Uni. SA	B. EC Education (External) & Honours	0-8	1.0
SA	Uni. SA	B. ECE (In-service)	0-8	
SA	Uni. SA	Bachelor of Teaching (Anangu) *3 yrs EFT	0-8	
TAS	Tasmania	B. Ed.(Early Childhood specialisation)	0-8	
VIC	Monash	B. Early Childhood Education	3-12	
VIC	RMIT	B. Education (EC Pathway)	0-12	0.5
VIC	Ballarat	B. Education (EC)	0-12	
VIC	Victoria Uni.	B. Education (EC & Primary)	0-12	1.0
WA	Curtin	B. Education (ECE)	0-8	
WA	Curtin	B. Education (ECE) Conversion	3-8	1.5
WA	ECU	B. Education (ECS)	0-8	1.0
WA	ECU	B. Education (K-7)	3-12	
WA	Murdoch	B. Education (EC and Primary Education)	3-12	

A number of programs nominate their age range as 3 to eight years, which means they qualify graduates to work with pre-school-aged children and primary school-aged children only, and do not offer the qualifications to work in childcare centres with children under three years of age.

## Double Degrees

A common way of bringing in course content other than Education is to offer a double degree. The double degrees programs are shown in Table 3. The University of Newcastle is the only institution to offer a double degree involving Education and Early Childhood Education. The rest link an Early Childhood degree with a degree from another discipline, such as Arts, Science and the Creative Arts. Two universities offer double degrees linking children's services with Education. The University of the Sunshine Coast offers a double degree in Early Childhood and Human Services. Griffith University also offers a double degree in Human Services (Child and Family Studies) and Education (primary).

While Charles Sturt University once offered a double degree in *Early Childhood (Birth to Five Years)* and *Nursing*, this double degree is no longer offered. At Charles Darwin University, the early childhood course offers students a unit of study in Maternal and child health which is not typical of the programs offered by other institutions.

Table 3 Undergraduate Double Degree Early Childhood Education Courses (Birth to Eight Years)

Jurisdiction	Institution	Title	Mode	Age	Credit for VET Dip. (yrs)
NSW	Newcastle	B. Teaching/ B. ECS & Honours	On-campus	0-8	
NT	CDU	B. Teaching and Learning/ B. Arts	Ext. /on-campus	0-8	1.0
NT	CDU	B. Teaching and Learning/ B. Science	On campus	0-8	1.0
NT	CDU	B. Teaching and Learning/ B. Creative Arts and Industries	On campus	0-8	1.0
QLD	CHC	B. Arts /B. Education (Primary/Early years)	On-campus	3-8	
QLD	Griffith	B. Human Services (Child and Family Studies)/ B. Education (Primary)	On-campus	0-12	
QLD	QUT	B. Arts/ B. Education (EC)	On-campus	0-8	
QLD	USC	B. Education (Early Childhood)/ B. Human Services	On-campus	0-8	
SA	Flinders	B. Education (EC)/ B. Arts & Honours	On-campus	0-8	

All of the double degree programs are provided on-campus except for the CDU program which has an external component. All of the programs can be completed in four years of full-time study, except for the Griffith program which is 4.5 years.

## Recognition of VET Diplomas

The standard course duration for a Bachelor's degree in Education is four years of full-time study, which can be reduced for applicants who hold other qualifications (at Certificate, Diploma or Degree level) by the granting of advanced standing for previous study. Applicants holding a Diploma of Children's Services are usually offered from one to two years' advanced standing within a four-year Early Childhood Degree, but the conditions vary considerably between institutions and courses.

Although they appear as standard undergraduate programs, many courses are targeted specifically at clients who are non-traditional university entrants, such as mature age

students and people holding Children’s Services Diplomas or other non-degree qualifications such as Education Worker Certificates. These targeted courses aim to address the educational needs of a specific group of students and are customised to maximise their educational outcomes. The strategies used to assist targeted students include offering courses on a part-time or external basis, or designing a separate pathway within a course for students entering on the basis of a VET Diploma. Examples of targeted programs include:

- the Double Degree offered by UNE in *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)/Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education)* is offered externally and part-time with a residential component;
- CQU’s *Bachelor of Learning Management* has a defined pathway for VET Diploma holders;
- the Double Degree offered by UWS in *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) / Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)* offers VET Diploma holders a separate pathway through the course, called *Pathway A*;
- USQ’s *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) and Honours* is offered on an external basis to VET Diploma holders only, and is targeted specifically to rural and isolated students;
- the four-year *Bachelor of Education (External)* offered by UniSA;
- the five-year *Bachelor of Education (Pre-service Early Childhood)* degree offered by QUT is an external, part-time course specifically for VET Diploma holders; and
- the four-year *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) Conversion* course at Curtin University.
- CSU’s three-year *Bachelor of Teaching (Birth to five years) graduate entry (VET)* is offered entirely on-line;
- CDU’s *Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (EC)* is offered on-campus and externally;
- Monash University’s *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies*, is offered on-campus; and
- Ballarat’s *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)* is only offered part-time.

Another example of a targeted program is the *University Preparation Course (Education Assistant Program)* offered to Education Assistants by ECU, which is offered part-time in a weekend delivery mode and which can provide an alternative entry pathway to a Bachelor’s degree.

## **Postgraduate Programs and Conversion courses**

The early childhood programs from Birth to Eight Years classified as post-graduate study are listed in Table 4. The duration of each program varies between courses and institutions. It could be argued that none of these qualifications are really at the post-graduate level in the sense that post-graduate studies should involve research. Entry qualifications for postgraduate studies are typically Honours qualifications and/or a Masters degree involving research.

The traditional purpose of a postgraduate qualification in teacher education is to provide an entry qualification for teaching. The Graduate Diploma of Education, for example, has long been considered an entry qualification to teaching for graduates holding bachelor’s

degrees in other disciplines. The courses in Table 4 that are entry qualifications into teaching include:

- *Bachelor of Education (EC)* Graduate Entry at UC, Flinders and UniSA;
- *Bachelor of Teaching*, University of Tasmania;
- *Master of Teaching (EC)* at UWS and Melbourne;
- The *Graduate Diplomas* offered at CDU, CQU, QUT, USC, Deakin, Ballarat, ECU and Montessori World Education Institute; and
- The *Graduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching* USQ.

Table 4 Postgraduate Early Childhood Education Degrees (Birth to Eight Years)

Juris-diction	Institution	Title	Years f/t	Mode	Age	Upgrade course for 3-yr ed. degrees
ACT	UC	B. Education (EC) (Grad Entry)	2.0	On-campus	3-8	
ACT	UC	B. Education EC Conversion	1.0	On-campus	3-8	Yes
NSW	Newcastle	M. Ed. Studies (currently inactive)	1.0	External	0-8	
NSW	UWS	M. Teach. (EC)	1.5	On-campus	0-8	Yes*
NT	CDU	Grad. Dip. Teaching and Learning	1.0	Ext./ On-campus	5-12	Yes
QLD	CQU	Grad. Dip. Learning and Teaching (EC)	1.0	External	3-12	
QLD	Griffith	Graduate Certificate Early Childhood	0.5	External	0-8	Yes
QLD	QUT	Grad. Dip. Ed. (Early Years)	1.0	On-campus/Ext.	3-8	
QLD	QUT	Grad Cert. Ed	0.5	On-campus/ Ext.	3-8	Yes
QLD	QUT	M. Education (EC)	1.0	On-campus/ Ext.	0-8	Yes
QLD	USC	Grad Dip. Ed (EC Pathway)	1.0	On-campus	3-8	Yes
QLD	USC	Grad. Cert. In Early Phase of Learning	0.5	On-campus	3-8	
QLD	USQ	Grad. Dip. Learning and Teaching (EC)	1.0	On-campus/ Ext.	3-8	
QLD	USQ	Grad Dip Ed (ECS)	1.0	External	0-8	Yes
SA	Flinders	B. Education (EC) (Graduate Entry)	2.0	On-campus	0-8	
SA	Uni. SA	B. ECE (Graduate entry)	2.0	On-campus	0-8	
TAS	Tasmania	B. Teaching (EC and Primary Spec.)	2.0	Multi-campus	0-12	Yes*
VIC	Deakin	Grad. Dip. Teaching (Primary)	1.0	On-campus	5-12	
VIC	Melbourne	M. Teaching (EC)	2.0	On-campus	0-8	
VIC	RMIT	Grad. Dip. Early Childhood Teaching	1.0	On-campus	0-8	Yes
VIC	RMIT	Grad. Dip. Education (Early Childhood)	1.0	On-campus	0-8	
VIC	Ballarat	Grad. Dip. Education (Primary)	1.0	Multi-campus	0-8	Yes
WA	ECU	Grad. Dip. Education (ECS)	1.0	On-campus	3-8	
WA	MWEI	Grad. Dip. Montessori Ed.	1.0	External	3-12	

\* Program is linked to a 3-year program offered internally, so possibly may not apply to 3-year trained teachers from other institutions

A second purpose served by the postgraduate programs in Table 4 is to upgrade the qualifications of teachers who hold three year Bachelor's degrees. As four year Bachelor's degrees are now the norm and are required for teacher registration in many jurisdictions, institutions are providing upgrade programs, some of which offer an Early Childhood

specialization. An example of an upgrade program is the UC's *Bachelor of Education EC Conversion*. Other upgrade programs are indicated in the final column of Table 4.

A third type of postgraduate course is one which provides an early childhood specialization for graduates with existing qualifications, either in teacher education or another field. These programs do not provide entry points to teaching qualifications, but some of the people undertaking them may already be qualified as teachers. These programs are:

- University of Newcastle's *Masters and Graduate Certificate in Education Studies* (teachers only);
- Griffith's *Graduate Certificate (Early Childhood)*;
- QUT's *Graduate Certificate and Masters of Education (Early Childhood)*;
- USC's *Graduate Certificate in Early Phase of Learning* (teachers and nurses only);
- USQ's *Graduate diploma of Education (ECS)* (teachers only);
- RMIT's *Graduate Diploma in Education (EC)*; and
- RMIT's *Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Teaching* (teachers only).

### **Early Exit qualifications models**

It is increasingly common for qualifications covering Birth to Five Years, to be offered as an early exit point from 4-year Early Childhood teaching degrees. This means that the student enrolls in a 4-year Early Childhood teaching degree, but can leave after three years study with a qualification for pre-school teaching. Many of the programs detailed in Part B of this report are 4-year or 5-year qualifications with several exit points. ACU's *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood)* is offered in Ballarat and Melbourne only as an exit degree only from the *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary)*. The *Bachelor of Education (ECE)* at Edith Cowan University (see Table 3) is also proposing to offer an exit award after three years.

At the postgraduate level, Melbourne University's *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)* offers a *Graduate Diploma* as an early exit award after 1.5 years as does UWS in its *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)*, documented in our case studies. The University of Newcastle, University of Sydney and QUT all offer a *Graduate Certificate* as an early exit from their Masters' programs.

One reason for creating exit points is to increase the employment options for students as they are completing the 4-year qualification. Early exit qualifications models are seen as particularly attractive to students who are in the workforce and studying part-time as well as students from disadvantaged social groups. The students may be able to use the qualification to continue working and studying, or take a break from study to join the workforce and re-enter the course in a few years' time. Another use of early exit qualifications is to facilitate the departure of less successful students from 4-year degree courses, while still providing them with a lower-level qualification. In these circumstances, universities would not offer the graduate a re-entry point to the course.

Some models of early childhood degrees provide multiple early exit points, by offering a qualification at the end of every year of full-time study, such as: a Certificate-level qualification after the first year of study, a HE Diploma after the second year, and a 3-year

degree after the third year of study (ie. a pre-school teaching qualification). The fourth year of study results in a school teaching qualification. Programs with multiple exit points include:

- Batchelor Institute's *Bachelor of Teaching (EC)* and *Bachelor of Education (EC)*;
- UniSA's *Bachelor of Education (Anangu Education)*;
- CQU's *Bachelor of Learning Management*; and
- USQ's *Bachelor of Education (EC) and Honours*.

## **Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

While all of the Early Childhood courses identified in this report would enrol Indigenous students, a few courses have been established specifically to promote access to early childhood education among Indigenous students living in regional or remote communities. Four institutions that provide early childhood education courses specifically for Indigenous students in regional and remote communities are:

- The Macquarie University 3-year *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Services)* course is run jointly between the Warawara Department of Indigenous Studies and Institute of Early Childhood within the university. It is an external program with a residential component.
- The Batchelor Institute's *Bachelor of Teaching (EC)* and *Bachelor of Education (EC)* is a multi-campus program specifically for Indigenous students.
- The University of South Australia's 2-year *Diploma in Education (Anangu Education)* and 3-year *Bachelor of Teaching (Anangu Education)* which qualifies to teach in Anangu primary schools is designed to enable Anangu students to work in childcare, pre-schools and primary schools within Anangu communities.
- The *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) Conversion* course at Curtin University's Bentley campus which is targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are currently working in early childhood or primary schools and who hold a Certificate III or IV for Education Workers or equivalent.

Research suggests that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas have to relocate to a centralised educational facility for long periods of study, the entrance rate and subsequent success rate to full teacher qualification is very limited. In particular, the entrance and success rate for Aboriginal people from remote areas is extremely low. This is why customised programs of teacher education try to reach Indigenous communities more directly. Where courses are delivered on-campus, they are compressed into intensive blocks of residential study. But most customised courses for Indigenous students aim to deliver units of study off-campus by:

- Going to the communities and teaching directly within them (ie. on school sites);
- Using tertiary education facilities near communities; or
- Using a regional campus of the institution that is closer to the communities.

A second feature of customised courses for Indigenous students is that the courses offer “early exits” to lower level qualifications during the course of study. For example, in the Batchelor Institute program, students may exit at the completion of each year of the program with a qualification:

- 1 year: *Diploma of Teaching*
- 2 years: *Advanced Diploma of Teaching*
- 3 years: *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood)*
- 4 years: *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)*

These programs follow the RATEP model, which, while not specifically an Early Childhood Program, is a well-established community-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education program in Queensland. The Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) began as a joint initiative between Education Queensland (specifically the Peninsula Regional Office), the Tropical North Queensland Institute of Technical and Further Education, James Cook University of North Queensland, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educational Consultative Committee, the Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Committee, the Office of Higher Education, the Queensland Open Learning Network and a variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community councils. The aim of the Program is to provide teacher education at the remote locations where people live and work while ensuring that there is no variation of the graduating standards or course objectives. RATEP also aims to ensure that culturally relevant content, structure and strategies are included in the teacher education courses.

RATEP has delivered teacher education courses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (based primarily in remote communities) through a variety of unique features and educational innovations, such as:

- basing tertiary education facilities in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- using computer technology to present courseware on CD ROM and online as a method of course delivery;
- using a diverse range of technology (computers, television, videos, facsimile, telephones and electronic mail) and written media (texts, workbooks, teacher coordinator guides and study guides) as integrated components of the course materials;
- using course content which is designed to be culturally appropriate; and
- using on site teacher coordinators (who are qualified teachers) as a means of providing academic and administrative support for students.

Since the commencement of RATEP in 1990, there have been 113 graduates with teachers placed throughout Queensland. There are currently some 50+ students studying towards their Bachelor of Education through RATEP at JCU.

One issue in the delivery of courses to Indigenous students in remote communities is the sheer length of time it takes students to work their way through the programs of study. It has been suggested that there would be value in providing shorter courses that train members of Indigenous communities in specific education strategies rather than aim for an entire teaching degree. While there are legitimate concerns that such an approach would undermine education standards, it could also be argued that the Western concept of an exclusive “teaching profession” is not consistent with holistic models of community development. For example, a holistic approach might involve training community members for a range of roles in health and education services, rather than concentrating resources on assisting one individual to attain a teaching degree.

In the Early Childhood field, there is considerable potential to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural expertise of community members and to explore ways of giving them meaningful role in children’s formal education during the early years. This could be through an Indigenous-specific qualification which develops the skills of community members as local language and culture specialists in an Early Childhood Education context. Giving local community members a prominent and important role in the education of children during the early years may help to build local capacity for teacher training over the longer term in Indigenous communities.

## **Summary**

An Early Childhood Education Degree is defined as a program of study that qualifies graduates to teach groups of children between the ages of birth and eight years. Our study was confined to courses offered by higher education institutions and therefore excluded courses offered below Bachelor’s level (ie. VET Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas), while including Associate Degrees (that are the HE equivalent of an Advanced Diploma in VET) and HE Diplomas. We identify at least 90 courses that meet these criteria.

Early Childhood degrees usually prepare graduates to work with:

- babies and toddlers (0-3 years);
- 4 year-old children in pre-schools (also called kindergartens in some states);
- 5 year-olds in pre-Year 1 settings (also called kindergarten or preparatory classes);
- 5-8 year-olds in Years 1 and 2 at school.

As many Early Childhood Education graduates work in primary schools, some ECE degrees also provide students with the skills to teach at both the ECE and the primary school level and therefore cover the age range of birth to 12 years. Nevertheless, the accepted definition of Early Childhood Education is that it extends from birth to eight years. Some Early childhood education courses are not accredited with Teacher Education and Registration authorities so their graduates are not permitted to teach in schools. While these courses are identified as 0-5 years in terms of coverage, their curriculum usually mirrors the standard Early childhood education definition of 0-8 years, but lacks the school-specific content required by the Teacher registration authorities.

All jurisdictions except the ACT now have teacher registration and accreditation authorities with which teachers must be registered before they are permitted to teach in

schools. These authorities have automatic jurisdiction over the employment of Early childhood education teachers in schools. However, the arrangements for funding and regulating pre-school provision for 4-year olds varies between states and territories, and between types of providers. There is no national consistency in the qualifications required of pre-school teachers and carers who are responsible for 4-year olds before they begin school.

Students who possess prior qualifications such as a Diploma of Children's Services may be awarded advanced standing of up to two years towards a four-year Early childhood education degree. The amount of advanced standing offered varies considerably between courses and many institutions make assessments on an individual basis.

A number of Early childhood education Degree programs are targeted to specific groups of students, such as holders of VET Diplomas or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who hold Certificates in education-related work. Customised programs use different modes of delivery to best meet the needs of their target groups. For example, many courses targeted to holders of VET Diplomas are offered part-time and externally so that the students can remain in the workforce while undertaking the degree. Some institutions offer programs targeted to Indigenous people working in education through multi-campus delivery in regional and remote locations. Others provide units of study in block residential mode.

It is increasingly common for Early childhood education degree programs to have a number of qualifications embedded within them. These "early exit" models typically offer: a Certificate awarded after one year of study; a Diploma awarded after two years of study; and a 3-year degree awarded upon completion of the third year of study, that would qualify the graduate to work in pre-schools and childcare (0-5 years). While many early exit models end after three years, some offer a fourth year of the degree that results in a teaching qualification recognised for teaching the early years of primary school. One reason for embedding early exit awards within degree programs is to increase the employment options for students as they are completing the 4-year qualification. The students may be able to use the preliminary qualifications to continue working and studying, or take a break from study to work full-time and re-enter the program at a later stage. A second use of early exit qualifications is to facilitate the departure of less successful students from 4-year degree courses, while still providing them with a lower-level qualification. In these circumstances, universities would not offer the graduate a re-entry point to the course.

## 2 Preparing the Early Childhood Teacher

Quality outcomes for young children are most likely when competent, qualified Early Childhood teachers interact with small groups of children in enriched environments

(Elliot 2006: 31).

The primary work of an Early Childhood teacher is to facilitate the social, physical, cognitive and emotional development of young children. A skilled Early Childhood teacher should be able to design and implement programs of learning to meet the developmental needs of children from the ages of birth to eight years. The quality of the pedagogy employed by the Early Childhood teacher influences the quality of outcomes in terms of child development. Research has consistently demonstrated that an enriched learning environment in the early years facilitates improved educational outcomes for children in the longer term. High quality early childhood programs tend to produce enhanced cognitive, language and social development, particularly among children from disadvantaged social backgrounds. The research also demonstrates that enriched learning environments are more likely to be created by professional Early Childhood teachers with higher education qualifications (Barnett 1996, Elliot 2006, Shore 1997, Willms 2002).

There are three major influences on the work of Early Childhood teachers in Australia: Early Childhood Teacher Preparation courses; the development of professional standards; and the role of Registration and Accreditation Authorities at the State and Territory level.

### ***Early Childhood Teacher Preparation***

The OECD argues that pedagogical frameworks in early childhood should extend from birth to eight years of age, and should focus broadly on children's holistic development and well-being, rather than on narrow literacy and numeracy objectives. The OECD contends that a pedagogical framework from birth to eight years promotes a more even level of quality across age groups and forms of provision, supports staff in their work with children, and facilitates communication and co-operation between staff and parents (OECD 2001: 110). The South Australian Education Department has developed a 0-18 curriculum with a strong focus on the early years.

The Federal government is currently developing a national Early Years Learning Framework that will apply to all children from birth to eight years and to all early childhood services. The Framework will recognise the importance of play-based learning, communication and language, including early literacy and numeracy, as well as emotional and social development. It will set out the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age as well as their transition to school.

Early childhood professionals and their representative bodies such as Early Childhood Australia, defend Early Childhood Education as a distinct pedagogical field. A key difference between Early Childhood studies and Primary school teacher education is the emphasis given to child-centred learning in Early Childhood pedagogy. Early Childhood studies draw on a range of disciplines such as child psychology, neuro-science, language

theory and educational studies to inform teachers' understanding of child development. University-level studies in Early Childhood education usually provide students with an understanding of the traditional cognitive theories of Jean Piaget and John Dewey, and Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, as well as constructivist concepts from contemporary socio-cultural theorists such as Lev Vygotsky and Barbara Rogoff.

Early Childhood teaching focuses heavily on "learning by doing", with teachers facilitating learning and development through play and interaction with small groups of children. Other common themes in Early Childhood teaching are a focus on the whole child and honouring a child's interests and choices. Play is a central means of facilitating a child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, and the role of the Early Childhood teacher is to provide young people with rich environments that assist them to interpret the world and to construct their own approaches to learning. Early Childhood teachers are expected to understand and respond to a child's learning needs, often in terms of Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development", which suggests that development occurs when children are given meaningful opportunities to practice new skills that are just beyond their present level of mastery. Elliot argues that the focus on child-centred learning has precluded the profession from adopting a curriculum for the Early Childhood years. She notes a widespread fear among Early Childhood educators that a curriculum would render their practice "content rather than child-driven" (Elliot 2006: 49)<sup>1</sup>.

Early Childhood education is a dynamic field of education research, which over the last decade has moved from its traditional emphasis on developmental psychology to exploring constructivist understandings of the social context of learning and development. Young children are increasingly portrayed as competent and capable agents in the negotiation of their learning and social experiences. The emotional foundations and social contexts of learning and development are now being given greater emphasis in the research and practice of Early Childhood teachers.

## **Career outcomes**

In some institutions, Early Childhood degrees equip graduates with the skills to teach in primary schools and therefore cover the age range of birth to 12 years. But the accepted definition of Early Childhood Education is that it covers birth to eight years. Early Childhood degrees prepare graduates to work with children from birth to eight years of age in the following settings:

- babies and toddlers (0-3 years);
- 4 year-old children in pre-schools (also called kindergartens in some states);
- 5 year-olds in pre-Year 1 settings (also called kindergarten or preparatory classes);
- 5-8 year-olds in Years 1 and 2 at school.

The extent to which Teacher Registration and Accreditation authorities have jurisdiction over the registration of teachers in the four types of early childhood settings is indicated in Table 5.

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<sup>1</sup> While most states and territories have developed early childhood curriculum frameworks, their coverage is patchy and their use is optional. South Australia is one exception as it has a mandatory curriculum framework from birth to 18 years.

Table 5 Regulation of early childhood teachers by early childhood setting, by state and territory

	<b>Babies and toddlers (0-3 years)</b>	<b>Pre-school (4 year-olds)</b>	<b>Pre-Year 1 (5 year-olds)</b>	<b>School Years 1 &amp; 2 (5-8 year-olds)</b>
<b>NSW</b>	All provision is in the childcare sector – maximum requirement a VET Diploma in Children’s Services, with some variation between states.	Requirement for a qualified early childhood teacher (eg. 3 or 4 year Bachelor’s degree-holders) varies between jurisdictions.	NSW Institute of Teachers	
<b>VIC</b>			Victorian Institute for Teaching	
<b>QLD</b>			Queensland College of Teachers	
<b>WA</b>			The WA College of Teaching	
<b>SA</b>			Teachers Registration Board of SA	
<b>TAS</b>			Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania	
<b>NT</b>			Teachers Registration Board of the NT	
<b>ACT</b>			ACT Department of Education and Training	

All jurisdictions except the ACT now have teacher registration and accreditation authorities with which teachers must be registered before they are permitted to teach in schools. These authorities have automatic jurisdiction over the employment of Early Childhood teachers in schools. The Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities also have a mutual recognition agreement whereby they recognise the qualifications of any teacher registered by a signatory to the agreement in the other seven jurisdictions. This means that teachers who are registered in one jurisdiction should be automatically registered by the authority in any other jurisdiction in Australia.

In addition to registering teachers, Teacher Education and Accreditation Authorities are increasingly assuming authority for the quality of teacher education courses, and accrediting “approved” teacher education courses offered by higher education institutions in their state. Again, mutual recognition agreements between the authorities mean that a course accredited in one jurisdiction will be recognised by all the others.

Many Early Childhood Education courses are not accredited with Teacher Education and Registration authorities which means that their graduates are not permitted to teach in schools. While these courses are identified as 0-5 years in terms of coverage, their curriculum usually mirrors the standard Early Childhood definition of 0-8 years, but lacks the school-specific content required by the Teacher registration authorities in their jurisdiction. This can include knowledge of state-mandated curriculum frameworks and supervised teaching experience in school settings.

Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities will not accredit Early Childhood Education courses unless they involve four years of study, specified content regarding curriculum and a mandatory minimum number of supervised professional experience days in schools. All the approved Early Childhood courses listed by Australia’s seven Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities are 4-year Bachelor’s degrees in Early Childhood Education which qualify teachers to work in the early years of schooling *as well as* prior-to-school settings. None of the teacher registration authorities have approved 3-year Bachelor’s degree courses that characterise many early childhood education programs, particularly in respect of pre-school provision.

As indicated in Table A, the recognition of Early Childhood education degrees is nationally consistent when Early Childhood graduates are seeking employment in schools,

either in pre-Year 1 or Years 1 and 2 of schooling. Through mutual recognition, an Early Childhood teacher who is registered with a teacher accreditation authority in one state or territory should gain automatic recognition by the teacher registration authority in any other jurisdiction to teach in the early years of school.

In respect of babies and toddlers, there is also national consistency in the sense that a VET Diploma of Children's Services is a national qualification and is therefore recognised in all jurisdictions. The number of teachers required to have this qualification varies between states and territories.

There is no national consistency in the requirement for qualified early childhood teachers at the pre-school level (4 year-olds). This varies by jurisdiction, and can be influenced by the type of provider and which set of regulations they come under. Child care services are regulated by different government departments within each jurisdiction – in some states these are education departments, but more often, they are departments of family and community services. For example, in most states when 4 year-olds attend a childcare centre, their program will be delivered primarily by childcare employees holding a VET Certificate in Children's Services and possibly designed by an employee who holds a Diploma of Children's Services. In some jurisdictions (eg. Queensland), the director of a large childcare service must have a 3-year degree in Early Childhood Education *or* an Advanced Diploma in Children's Services. But in other jurisdictions, it is acceptable for the Director of a childcare service to have a nursing degree. In New South Wales, childcare centres are required to employ a teaching staff member (who must have a Degree or Diploma in Early Childhood Education) for groups of 30-40 children over the age of two.

Within jurisdictions, pre-school provision can be a mix of government-operated pre-schools, private and community-based pre-schools and childcare centres (community-based or privately owned). While government-operated pre-schools usually come under the jurisdiction of an Education Department, other pre-school providers, such as childcare centres or early learning centres will be governed by children's services legislation (which in many states is implemented by a family and community services agency, rather than an education department). Thus 4 year-olds attending a government-run pre-school (ie, administered by an Education Department) are likely to be taught by an Early Childhood teacher with a 3 or 4-year Bachelor's degree (with the help of an assistant). In the ACT, for example, where all pre-schools are government-operated, children in pre-schools are taught by a qualified pre-school teacher whereas 4-year-olds in childcare centres fall under different legislation which does not mandate the qualifications of staff above VET Diploma level. A privately-owned pre-school might also employ a qualified Early Childhood teacher, but would not be obliged to do so, if it is registered as a childcare facility under children's services legislation.

A further complication is that in some jurisdictions non-government pre-schools may receive subsidies from State Education Departments and the receipt of this funding can involve meeting minimum qualification requirements – even though the pre-school would be registered under childcare legislation.

## **Professional standards**

Professions Australia, the national peak body of professional associations defines a profession in the following terms:

A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others. (Professions Australia 1997).

Professions Australia also argues that a profession must have, and hold its members accountable to, a Code of Ethics.

It is inherent in the definition of a profession that a code of ethics governs the activities of each profession. Such codes require behaviour and practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual. They define and demand high standards of behaviour in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues. Further, these codes are enforced by the profession and are acknowledged and accepted by the community. (Professions Australia 1997)

In 1992 Early Childhood Australia produced a national *Code of Ethics* which provides a framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood professionals. Revised in 2006, the *Code of Ethics* provides a detailed description of the responsibilities of Early Childhood professionals in their relationships with children, families, colleagues, communities, students and employers as well as participating in research. The *Code of Ethics* conveys a strong sense of the skills and priorities of Early Childhood teachers and of contemporary best practice in Early Childhood teaching (Early Childhood Australia 2006).

Another way of defining what an Early Childhood Teacher should know and be able to do is through the development of professional standards. Professional standards identify the knowledge, skills, understanding and judgement used by professionals in their day-to-day work, based on professional values, the experience of highly regarded practitioners and research. In Australia, many specialist professional associations of teachers and school leaders have been involved in developing professional standards for their members. Professional standards have been developed by associations representing subject specialists such as music teachers, geography teachers, mathematics teachers and teacher librarians. Employers of teachers and principals have also developed standards for teachers and principals that are specific to their own jurisdictions.

The teacher accreditation and registration authorities in each state and territory have their own professional standards for teachers which are used in registration processes. Teaching Australia, the national body for teachers and school leaders is developing national professional standards for advanced teachers and school leaders to encapsulate what skilled teaching professionals know and do as a single profession, regardless of specialisation or sector of schooling (Teaching Australia 2008). Teaching Australia has commissioned Early Childhood Australia to provide advice on the development of

national professional standards for Early Childhood teachers, which should make the knowledge and skills of the profession more explicit.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) in the USA has developed professional standards for Early Childhood teachers. The NBPTS is an independent, not-for-profit corporate body which sets standards and assesses experienced practising teachers who apply for NBPTS certification. Increasingly, school system authorities in various Australian jurisdictions are using NBPTS-certification as a measure of teacher performance and are awarding higher salaries on this basis.

The NBPTS sets standards in more than thirty fields of teaching covering developmental stages and subject areas (eg. Early Childhood, Mathematics). These standards are determined by Standards Committees in each field comprised of 15 members who are broadly representative of accomplished teachers in their fields, including practising teachers, teacher educators, researchers and other professionals. Early childhood standards were published in 1995 and revised in 2001. The standards are grouped under nine categories:

1. Understanding Young Children
2. Equity, Fairness, and Diversity
3. Assessment
4. Promoting Child Development and Learning
5. Knowledge of Integrated Curriculum
6. Multiple Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning
7. Family and Community Partnerships
8. Professional Partnerships; and
9. Reflective Practice

With over 60 pages of accompanying text, the NBPTS standards are the most detailed contemporary professional standards in Early Childhood education. One limitation of the standards is that they are for teachers of students between the ages of three to eight years, and therefore do not encompass the education and care of babies and toddlers (ie. birth-8 years). Second, all NBPTS standards describe the work of *advanced* teachers, who have acquired many years of experience in the field, and are not intended to depict the knowledge and skills of new entrants to the profession. They do, nevertheless provide a rich picture of the knowledge and skills of accomplished Early Childhood teachers in the 3-8 years context (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2001).

### ***Registration and Accreditation Authorities***

As Early Childhood teachers work across both the childcare and the education industry sectors, they are governed by two different and sometimes competing regulatory environments: Children's services regulations; and Teacher Education Registration and Accreditation Authorities.

## Community Services sector

In order to be eligible for childcare benefits and other funding support, childcare services are required to satisfy regulations determined by health and welfare Departments in each State and Territory. South Australia and Tasmania are the only jurisdictions in which childcare regulations are administered by the Department of Education. In all other jurisdictions, they are administered by Departments of health, human services and community services (National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. 2008).

Children's services regulations are broadly similar in that they specify: staff to children ratios; staff qualification requirements; minimum health standards; and police checks for staff. Given chronic shortages of staff in the childcare sector, many childcare services receive exemptions from the staff qualification requirements to continue operating. A survey of state and territory regulations is provided in Appendix B of the Pathways report (Watson 2006). From this survey of each jurisdiction's childcare regulatory and licensing framework, it appears that while a minimum number of staff must be qualified within each service, the minimum qualification accepted is a two-year Diploma of Children's Services or a Certificate of Children's Services. In 2005, when the survey was conducted, no jurisdiction required a childcare service provider to employ an Early Childhood professional with a four-year degree. This does not mean that Early Childhood professionals are precluded from working in childcare services but that their employment is not mandated by state and territory regulations covering the industry.

To remain approved for Childcare Benefit purposes, childcare providers are required to participate in a *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* managed nationally by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) Inc. The Council requires childcare service providers to pay an annual registration fee, and submit a Self-Study report as a condition of initial registration. NCAC-appointed assessors ("validators") are entitled to visit the service for quality assurance purposes, either by appointment or for "spot checks". Services are assessed against a set of national standards and providers are expected to make improvements where they are required (National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. 2006).

The *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* is based on a set of national standards called 33 principles categories under seven "Quality areas":

1. Staff Relationships with Children and Peers
2. Partnerships with Families
3. Programming and Evaluation
4. Children's Experiences and Learning
5. Protective Care and Safety
6. Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing
7. Managing to Support Quality

Each of the 33 standards ("principles") identified under the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* is supported by a series of indicators of good practice. Service providers are rated on a four point scale against these indicators and the results are reported nationally twice a year (National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. 2007). Examples of the standards ("principles") under three of the categories is provided in Table 6

Table 6 Extracts from Quality Improvement and Accreditation System standards

<p><b>Quality Area 1: Staff Relationships with Children and Peers</b></p> <p>1.1: Staff interact with each child in a warm and friendly way</p> <p>1.2: Staff guide each child's behaviour in a positive way</p> <p>1.3: Staff initiate and maintain respectful communication with each child</p> <p>1.4: Staff respect each child's background and abilities</p> <p>1.5: Staff treat all children equitably</p> <p>1.6: Staff communicate effectively to promote respect and professional teamwork.</p> <p><b>Quality Area 3: Programming and Evaluation</b></p> <p>3.1: The program reflects a clear statement of centre philosophy</p> <p>3.2: Each child's learning is documented and used in planning the program</p> <p>3.3: The program assists each child to be a successful learner.</p> <p><b>Quality Area 4: Children's Experiences and Learning</b></p> <p>4.1: Staff encourage each child to make choices and participate in play</p> <p>4.2: Staff promote each child's ability to develop and maintain relationships</p> <p>4.3: Staff promote each child's language and literacy abilities</p> <p>4.4: Staff promote each child's problem-solving and mathematical abilities</p> <p>4.5: Staff promote each child's enjoyment of and participation in the expressive arts</p> <p>4.6: Staff promote each child's physical abilities.</p>
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Source: *National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. 2007.*

The national standards for the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* reflect the child-centred philosophy of Early Childhood Education, with a strong emphasis on building productive relationships and on the value of play. Services are expected to implement early childhood programs and to evaluate every child's progress. The indicators for each principle are not included.

## School education sector

The second regulatory environment governing Early Childhood professionals is created by Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities, namely

- The NSW Institute of Teachers
- The Victorian Institute for Teaching
- The Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory
- The Queensland College of Teachers
- The Teachers Registration Board Tasmania
- The Teachers Registration Board of South Australia
- The Western Australian College of Teaching

Established in all States and Territories except the ACT, Teacher Registration and Accreditation authorities influence Early Childhood teachers in Australia through performing two roles:

- the registration of teachers; and
- the accreditation of teacher preparation programs.

While State Departments of Families and Community Services are responsible for the registration and accreditation of child-care facilities in most jurisdictions, Teacher Education and Accreditation Authorities are increasingly responsible for the quality of teaching through the registration of teaching staff for schools, but not pre-schools. Pre-schools and early learning centres which cater for 3-5 year-olds operate on a different basis with different funding arrangements in all states and territories. In the ACT, for example, pre-schools are managed and funded by the State Education Department, whereas in Victoria, pre-schools are operated by a range of agencies, including municipal councils, with funding from the State government. In New South Wales, 100 pre-schools are operated by the State Department of Education, while some 800 are run by community organisations with funding from the State government.

In New South Wales, the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) which was established as a registration body for teachers, only registers teachers who work in registered schools because the relevant Act does not include teachers who work outside of registered schools. This means that early childhood teachers working in prior-to-school settings like pre-schools and long day care centres are not eligible for registration as professional teachers in NSW.

Teacher Registration authorities in all jurisdictions have developed sets of professional teaching standards to govern the registration of teachers in schools. But no authority has developed standards specific to Early Childhood teachers.

The NSWIT's registration and accreditation processes are based on its *Professional Teaching Standards Framework*. The *Framework for Professional Teaching Standards* describes what teachers – at each of four defined stages of their career – should know, understand and do (New South Wales Institute of Teachers 2005). In New South Wales, what teachers need to know, understand and do, is specified under seven headings or “elements” in the *Framework for Professional Teaching Standards* which are:

1. Teachers know their subject content and how to teach that content to their students;
2. Teachers know their students and how students learn;
3. Teachers plan, assess and report for effective learning;
4. Teachers communicate effectively with their students;
5. Teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments through the use of classroom management skills;
6. Teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice; and
7. Teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community.

The recent move by Teacher Registration and Accreditation authorities to extend their role to the accreditation of teacher preparation programs has the potential to influence the delivery of early childhood education courses as a pedagogical framework extending from birth to eight years. Universities which register their Early Childhood programs in New South Wales, for example, must meet the requirements of the New South Wales Institute of Teachers in respect of primary school teachers. The guidelines issued by the Institute state that the six essential requirements of teacher preparation programs are:

1. Literacy
2. Aboriginal Education
3. Teaching students from non-English speaking backgrounds
4. Special Education
5. Classroom and Behaviour Management
6. Information and Communication Technologies

(New South Wales Institute of Teachers 2007)

The Institute also mandates minimum hours of practical experience for teacher preparation courses that must be in school settings and emphasises disciplinary studies, particularly in areas such as mathematics and science and technology. Documentation issued by the NSW Institute of Teachers advises providers that:

Program documentation must demonstrate ways in which Graduate Teacher Standards are met through the curriculum, assessment and professional placement aspects of the program. Standards dealing with subject content and other key elements (literacy, special education, information and communication technology, etc.) must be explicitly met (NSW Institute of Teachers 2008)

The OECD argues that early childhood pedagogy should be broad and holistic and that training in the pedagogy of primary school teaching is different.

Downward pressure on ECEC to adopt the content and methods of the primary school has a detrimental effect on young children's learning. Therefore, it is important that early childhood is viewed not only as a preparation for the next stage of education (or even adulthood) but also as a distinctive period where children live out their lives. Stronger co-operation with schools is a positive development as long as the specific character and traditions of quality early childhood practice are preserved (OECD 2002: 129)

The entrenched differences in the regulatory and funding environments of childcare and school education perpetuate what Elliot (2006) calls the "care-education dichotomy" in Early Childhood provision. While this dichotomy is recognised as an inappropriate conceptual model, it is perpetuated by the legislative and structural divisions in the funding and provision of services for children from birth to eight years of age.

## **Summary**

An Early childhood education teacher is an education professional who supports and facilitates the development of young children from the ages of birth to eight years. Early childhood education teachers recognise that children's learning occurs from birth, rather than from when they enter formal schooling. Research suggests that the provision of high quality early childhood education programs can contribute significantly to reducing disparities in children's learning and development, and contribute positively to the long-term outcomes of formal schooling.

The primary work of an Early childhood education teacher is to facilitate the social, physical, cognitive and emotional development of young children. A skilled Early childhood education teacher should be able to design and implement programs of learning that meet the developmental needs of children from the ages of birth to eight years. Early childhood education is a distinct pedagogical field with an emphasis on child-centred learning.

There are many influences on the work of Early childhood education teachers in Australia. While there are currently no national professional standards for the Early childhood education teacher, their work is defined by:

- a *Code of Ethics* produced by Early Childhood Australia; and
- the 33 standards of provision defined for childcare providers under the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System*, issued by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.

The Federal government is currently developing a national Early Years Learning Framework that will apply to all children from birth to eight years and to all early childhood services. The Framework will recognise the importance of play-based learning, communication and language, including early literacy and numeracy, as well as emotional and social development. It will set out the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age as well as their transition to school.

The role of Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities in accrediting teacher preparation courses is having an influence on Early Childhood Education and there is a need to balance the authorities' need for curriculum-based studies with the unique pedagogical demands of Early Childhood Education. It is important to acknowledge and respect the concept of a pedagogical framework for early childhood education from birth to eight years.

### 3 Trends in Early Childhood course delivery

Research consistently demonstrates that access to higher education in Australia is influenced by a person's family background. Family background characteristics associated with low rates of participation in higher education include low levels of parental education, low family income, Indigenous status, and living in a rural area. The low tertiary participation rate of people with these characteristics is of concern to policy makers, for reasons of social equity as well as economic productivity.

Governments and tertiary institutions have introduced a range of programs that aim to improve the access of under-represented groups to Australian universities. However, simply facilitating access to university courses for students from disadvantaged social groups is not always sufficient. There are significant cultural and social barriers to the successful participation of students from marginalised social groups in higher education that tertiary institutions and schools also need to address (Atweh and Bland 2007).

In the Early Childhood field, many students commence university studies as mature-age entrants who have completed a Diploma in Children's Services and have work experience in child care. They are often enrolled part-time and continue to work full-time while studying. Many also have family responsibilities. These factors place competing demands on their time and increase their risk of dropping out of higher education. In general, students who enter university on the basis of TAFE experience are more likely to drop out of their course than students with Year 12. A recent study of one institution found that VET award holders dropped out at almost double the rate for all students (Long, Fran Ferrier and Heagney 2006).

The *Pathways* Report (Watson 2006) concluded that mature-age students with a Diploma in Children's Services appeared to be most disadvantaged when they enrolled in "mainstream" programs that catered predominantly to Year 12 school leavers. Secondary schools prepare their senior students for university studies by inducting them into the style of writing and expression used in higher education. Year 12 completers usually arrive at university with a repertoire of academic literacy skills that have provided them with an entrée into academic discourse. Students who have not completed Year 12 but are admitted on the basis of a vocational Diploma report feeling "daunted" at the level of academic literacy expected of them in first year university studies.

Learning part-time exacerbates the challenges faced by students admitted on the basis of a VET Diploma. Working full-time and attending university out of business hours limits the access of part-time students to university facilities, such as the library and to learning support such as academic skills services. These students may also experience social isolation and lack of social support, and may be overlooked by lecturers as the "minority" within a course where the majority is Year 12 school leavers studying full-time. Working full time and having limited time to study and to seek additional support if needed, contributes to a high drop-out rate among part-time mature-age students.

Learning by distance can also be hazardous for students from disadvantaged social groups if they are studying courses dominated by Year 12 completers. Students who live in rural areas and who need to study part-time due to work or family commitments have little choice other than distance learning. Yet learning by distance further compounds any challenges this cohort might face in meeting the academic demands of higher education. Like part-time students on campus, distance students have very limited access to facilities and to academic support, and are also likely to experience social isolation. All of these factors contribute to drop-out rates among distance education students.

As discussed in the *Pathways* Report (Watson 2006), students who lack experience of higher education are likely to find the academic demands of university study challenging in the first instance. If they are studying by distance, and/or are enrolled part-time, the challenges can be compounded by lack of access to facilities and learning support.

In response to these problems, some institutions have taken the initiative to meet the needs of VET award holders and other sub-groups, such as Indigenous students, through developing customised courses or pathways to degrees for specific groups of students. The courses mapped in this report illustrate the range of ways in educational institutions are promoting access to Early childhood studies among students from diverse social groups. The common feature of the new programs is that they offer different modes of learning to suit students' learning needs and to accommodate their life circumstances. The three courses identified below for closer examination exemplify these trends.

## **Case Studies**

In this section we examine in more detail three of the four year degree courses as case studies of emerging trends. The courses discussed in this section have been chosen as representative of certain features we think are important to highlight, rather than because they are exceptional. The mapping of Early Childhood Education degree courses (see Part B of this study) has identified the following groups of students accessing Early Childhood Education courses:

- Pre-service undergraduate Education students. These are often Year 12 school graduates entering university degree courses on TER scores.
- Pre-service undergraduate students with a degree in another discipline who are seeking a teaching qualification, or Early Childhood specialisation
- Three or four-year trained teachers looking to upgrade and/or broaden their current field of practice into other early childhood settings.
- Childcare employees who hold TAFE Diploma or equivalent qualifications. These are often mature aged women who are working in the field and who need special access and support services if they are to successfully make the transition from the competency-based training of their previous study to the more academically oriented requirements of higher education study.
- Small cohorts of Indigenous students and/or field workers aiming to become teachers or educational support workers within their communities.

To illustrate the way in which Australian Higher Education institutions are moving to accommodate students from these different backgrounds, we have chosen for examination the following three courses:

- University of Western Sydney: *Master of Teaching/Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)*
- University of Central Queensland: *Bachelor of Learning Management (Early Childhood)*
- University of South Australia: *Bachelor of Education (External)*

These three courses illustrate the responsiveness of higher institutions to the diverse range of needs of those looking to enter this field or to upgrade and broaden their career options. The case studies illustrate how each institution employs a combination of strategies to improve the pathways to qualifications for their target group. The popular strategies include:

- Multi-campus delivery;
- Externally delivered courses designed specifically for target groups;
- On-campus courses designed specifically for target groups;
- The provision of early exit qualifications and multiple entry and re-entry points within a course of study;
- Teaching units of study in blocks, either on campus (residential) or off-campus;
- Providing explicit pathways from entry qualifications to further qualifications;
- Recognising and granting credit for prior qualifications, such as VET Diplomas.

This ‘pathways’ approach being developed by a number of Higher Education institutions has led to the development of programs of study that have clear pathways for different cohorts of students. This enables greater recognition of students’ various backgrounds, qualifications on entry to the degree course, and range of work experience within the field.

The case studies illustrate three types of pathways models:

- A multi-campus undergraduate degree course with different entry requirements and delivery modes designed to cater to students who are geographically dispersed (eg CQU);
- An on-campus postgraduate degree course with several pathways courses leading into it and multiple early exit points (eg UWS);
- An external undergraduate degree courses for specific groups of students (eg UniSA).

### **Case 1: University of Western Sydney: *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) /Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)***

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) *Master of Teaching* course illustrates the way many institutions are moving to meet both tighter accreditation requirements and the needs of an increasingly diverse cohort of students - from those seeking their initial pre-service

qualification to those working in the field who wish to broaden or deepen their professional opportunities. The program structure is illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7 UWS *Master of Teaching (EC)/Bachelor of EC studies* Program Structure

	Students	Duration of Study	Qualification	Course	Duration of Study	Outcome
Pathway A	VET Diploma in Children's Services (Penrith, Bankstown)	1.5 years*	Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child & Family)	Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)	1.5 years	Birth - 8 years NSW Institute of Teachers
Pathway B	General entry (Penrith)	3 years		Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Early Childhood)	1 year**	Birth – 5 years NSW Dept of Community Services

\*Students receive 1.5 years credit for VET Diploma

\*\* early exit qualification from Masters Program

Since 2005 UWS students have been able to enrol in a three-year *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)* program and, on successful completion, receive guaranteed entry into a one-and-a-half year *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)* course. On completion, graduates emerge with a double degree in early childhood education that is recognised by both the NSW Institute of Teaching and the NSW Department of Community Services. With this dual recognition, graduates are qualified to teach in long day care, preschools and in the early years of school (birth to 8 years). Those who exit the program early (that is, with the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies) can working in child and family support services in early childhood setting but are not qualified to teach in NSW 'prior to school settings or in K-2 classes'.

A separate pathway is provided for undergraduate students who are holders of Diploma of Children's Services. These students typically receive up to two years (equivalent) advanced standing and can complete the *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)* degree in the equivalent of one year of full-time study. By providing a separate pathway ('Pathway A') for this cohort, special attention can be paid to the needs of these students to ensure their transition from the competency-based training provided through their TAFE studies to the more academically-based approach required in tertiary institutions while at the same time recognizing their work-related experience in childcare.

A third 'pathway' onto the *Master of Teaching* 'entry ramp' is via the *Bachelor of Education (Primary)* course. For this cohort of students, the *Master of Teaching (EC)* offers access to qualifications that allow primary-trained teachers to work as early childhood teachers. UWS also offers a five year *Bachelor of Education (Primary-AREP)* course specifically for Indigenous students on its Bankstown campus. The course is offered in a block release mode that requires students to attend four residential schools per year for approximately two weeks.

Once in the *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)* program, students can choose whether to undertake the program full-time (over 18 months) or part-time up to three years. Students can also opt to graduate with the early exit award of the *Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Early Childhood)*. This qualification does not, however, allow graduates to teach in schools.

The UWS *Master of Teaching* effectively provides graduates with a double degree. As such it provides an effective way to meet the diverse needs of students entering with first degrees in other areas – including three year trained teachers and three year trained early childhood workers. One possible limitation of the course is that it is provided on-campus only.

## Course content

The program’s course content reflects the requirement as set by the accreditation body – in this case the NSW Institute of Teachers – with an Early Childhood focus. There is a mix of education studies, curriculum studies, professional practice, and professional experience (practicum).

Table 8 University of Western Sydney: Masters of Teaching (Early Childhood) Curriculum summary

<p><b>Mathematics, Science and Technology 0-8:</b> This unit aims to develop a critical and meaningful understanding of how mathematics, science and technology shape our lives and the world we live in ... This unit will foster positive dispositions towards science, mathematics and technology in both the early childhood teachers and young children.</p> <p><b>Fostering Creativity in Children's Learning:</b> This unit focuses on processes of creative thinking and creative expression in young children and introduces students to the theory and practices of using drama, music, movement and visual arts in prior to school and school contexts ... provides an understanding of the importance of art forms both as powerful teaching and learning strategies across the early childhood years and as creative arts in their own right.</p> <p><b>Curriculum for Under Threes:</b> Examines the role of families and communities in children's learning and emphasises the essential role of partnerships in the provision of meaningful curriculum for young children ... also includes consideration of health and safety requirements, the role of interactions, play experiences and culturally responsive routines in the provision of learning environments for under threes.</p> <p><b>Pro-social Learning Environments:</b> Educators of young children are responsible for guiding and leading children in the development of self-discipline, moral autonomy, a sense of social belonging and well being while acknowledging developmental needs, pluralistic community values, expectations, standards, norms and rules ... This unit will provide students with the opportunity to focus in depth on a range of approaches to behaviour, social interactions and guidance. It also enables students to reflect on the impact of these approaches on children's development and learning while critically evaluating their personal and professional dispositions regarding behaviour and guidance.</p> <p><b>Literacy 0-8:</b> Issues relating to the language and literacy development of young children from birth to eight. It investigates the nature of literacy learning which incorporates listening, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, drawing, visual literacy and critical literacy as it occurs in children's daily lives in diverse contexts.</p> <p><b>Engaging Children in Curriculum:</b> Examines a range of approaches to curriculum with a particular focus on preschoolers and children in the early years of school. It explores strategies for connecting curriculum to children's social worlds and for facilitating in-depth investigations and critical thinking ... Students will also become familiar with the NSW Board of Studies Personal Development, Health and Physical Development Syllabus.</p>
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**Children's Services: Management and Administration:** Management theory and practice in the context of early childhood, school and community settings ... Strategic planning and evaluation

**Investigating Social Worlds:** Students will draw on Bourdieu's frameworks of social and cultural capital and critically examine the relationship between the 'self' and the 'social' in relation to how children learn about identity, family, culture, environments, social justice, critical thinking, decision-making, understanding and promoting diversity in a globalised changing world.

**The Reflective Practitioner:** The development of a critically reflexive orientation and the development of collaborative reflective strategies as they relate to curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation. The unit locates this important attribute in the context of understandings of professionalism and aims to position students as pedagogical leaders in the field of early childhood education.

Students must undertake three sessions of professional experience over the 18 month period of the course. One must be taken in a 0-3 years setting, and two in either a 3-5 year setting or a 5-8 setting.

The curriculum presents the Early Childhood pedagogy in a birth to eight years context and teaches the mandated subjects of literacy and numeracy in the birth to eight years format. To give a flavour of the overall content, we provide below the brief descriptions of unit content provided to students enrolling in this program in Table 8. These are arranged in the order in which students are recommended to take them.

## Similar courses

A number of other institutions identified in this report offer Masters-level courses that are designed for those seeking to upgrade their existing professional qualifications, so their purpose is different to the UWS program which is an initial teaching qualification. The Queensland University of Technology, for example, offers a *Master of Education (Early Childhood)* as a one year (equivalent full-time) on-campus or external course. But this course is available to qualified teachers only and is designed for those seeking to become early childhood specialists. Similarly, the University of Newcastle offers a *Master of Educational Studies* as a one year (equivalent full-time) external course for qualified teachers wishing to undertake advanced early childhood studies.

The recently established Melbourne University *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)* is an initial teaching degree for registration purposes, as are the various *Graduate Diploma (Early Childhood Specialization)* courses on offer. But the Melbourne model does not offer the multiple entry and exit options of the UWS model.

The five-year *Bachelor of Education (Pre-service Early Childhood)* degree offered by QUT is the most similar postgraduate model to the UWS case study. The QUT program is also designed for students who possess a Diploma or Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services) and who have work experience in the early childhood industry, either in childcare, pre-schools or before and after school care. The degree offers up to one and a half years' advanced standing to applicants with these qualifications, thus potentially reducing the duration of the course to 3.5 years equivalent full-time study. Applicants from regional and remote areas are encouraged to apply as delivery is customised and external.

Several other programs of study also have the multiple entry and exit points of the UWS model, such as:

- UNE's *Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Education (EC)* an external targeted course, (as is the UniSA case study below); and
- UniSA's *Diploma and Bachelor of Teaching (Anangu Education)*, CQU's *Bachelor of Learning Management (EC)*, and Batchelor Institute's *Bachelor of Education (EC)*, all of which are multi-campus, outreach models.

## **Case 2: University of Central Queensland: *Bachelor of Learning Management (Early Childhood)***

This four year undergraduate course is a pre-service preparation for those who aim to pursue a career as an early childhood teacher. Graduates are qualified to teach in day care centres, preschools or primary schools from Year 1 to 7 (that is, for children aged 0-12 years). It was chosen as a case study because it represents a multi-campus mode of delivery and aims to access a geographically dispersed group of students.

This undergraduate degree course is delivered at six separate regional campuses in Central Queensland. These campuses are located at:

- Bunderberg
- Emerald
- Gladstone
- Mackay
- Noosa Hub
- Rockhampton

Like many of the courses identified in this study, the current program at Central Queensland replaced an earlier suite of Bachelor of Education programs. This program, established in 2000, was designed to better meet the accreditation requirements for four-year trained early childhood educators. It includes considerably more professional experience than former courses. A total of 100 days of embedded professional practice is required, in a variety of educational settings. In addition, in the final term of their degree, students undertake a ten-week internship. This emphasis on practical experience is seen as providing:

“... a futures-oriented degree that is dedicated to the graduation of ‘classroom-ready’ teachers who are experts in ‘learning’ and its management”.

The course provides students with opportunities to ‘fast-track’ their studies. Students can complete the course in three, rather than four, years. To fast-track students take additional units of study in third term. These third term units are provided across all six campuses providing suitably qualified staff can be found in the local area.

Early-exit ‘ramps’ are available: students must complete 32 courses to graduate from the *Bachelor of Learning Management* program. However, they have three early exit ramps. On the completion of 8 courses, they can exit with a *Diploma of Learning Management*; with 16 courses they can exit with an *Associate Degree of Learning Management*, and with 24 courses they can exit with a *Bachelor of Learning Design*. None of these early-exit courses qualify the graduate for teacher registration.

Another feature of the CQU program is that it provides a study strand for those training to take up teaching positions in Catholic education facilities. The provision of a range of study strands and professional experiences across eight separate campuses places demands on university resources. Recruiting suitable staff in these regional centres is reported to be the most challenging aspect of maintaining this multi-campus delivery mode.

## Course content

As already noted, the full degree program consists of 32 courses and in a typical four year program, these units include studies in: education and child development; key curriculum areas - including literacy, numeracy, maths, science, the arts, and SOSE, as well as play-based learning; and professional management of learning.

Professional experience is embedded in all years of the course. A list of the units on offer, and the recommended sequence in which they should be taken, gives a sense of the range of areas covered. This range reflects the accreditation requirements set by the Queensland College of Teachers.

Table 9 Central Queensland University: Bachelor of Learning Management, Typical four year structure: 32 courses (92 units of study)

<p><b>Year 1</b>            Health &amp; Physical Education Curriculum &amp; Pedagogy            The Arts            Learning Management            Principles of University Learning            Competence in English            Numeracy in the Classroom            Effective Learning Environments            Portal Task Experience I            The Global Future            Images of Childhood            Challenges of Early Childhood Education (offered in alternative years)</p>	<p><b>Year 2</b>            Science Curriculum &amp; Pedagogy            Literacy In the Classroom            Essential Professional Knowledge            Portal Task Experience II            Sustainable Communities (SOSE)            Professional Knowledge And Practice            Ensuring Student Success            The Contemporary Child            Play Based Learning (offered in alternative years)</p>
<p><b>Year 3</b>            Numeracy in Action            Managing Diversity            Teaching Reading            English Curriculum and Pedagogy            Early Childhood Education and Care Settings            Managing E-Learning</p>	<p><b>Year 4</b>            Advocacy, Leadership and Change in Early Childhood            Professional Knowledge In Context            Portal Task Experience III            Portal Task Experience V - Internship            Portal Task Experience IV            Professional Skills in the Contemporary World</p>

## External program

In addition to the multi-campus program CQU offers a separate 'flexible mode' (external) program for holders of TAFE Diploma (Children's Services) degrees who are working in the early childhood field. Students in this study strand can receive up to eight course credits (the equivalent of one year). This effectively reduces their program to a three-year (full-time) program. The units of study for this program, shown in the Table below,

demonstrate the mix of curriculum studies (key learning areas), education studies, child development units, and professional development typical of the on-campus courses but without the curriculum units in Health and Physical Education, Arts Education, and Play-based Learning. Managing diversity and two of the professional studies units have also been dropped from the fourth year program.

Table 10 Central Queensland University: Bachelor of Learning Management: Pathway B, for students with a VET Diploma in Children’s Services (Childcare)

<p><b>Year 1</b>            Literacy In the Classroom            Learning Management            Competence in English            Numeracy in the Classroom            Sustainable Communities (SOSE)            Professional Knowledge And Practice            The Global Future            Images of Childhood            Challenges of Early Childhood Education (offered in alternative years)</p>
<p><b>Year 2</b>            Science Curriculum &amp; Pedagogy            Numeracy in Action            Advocacy, Leadership and Change in Early Childhood            Essential Professional Knowledge            English Curriculum and Pedagogy            Early Childhood Education and Care Settings            Ensuring Student Success            Managing E-Learning            The Contemporary Child (offered in alternative years)</p>
<p><b>Year 3</b>            Professional Knowledge In Context            Teaching Reading            Portal Task Experience III            Portal Task Experience V - Internship            Portal Task Experience IV            Professional Skills in the Contemporary World.</p>

### Similar courses

The *Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) Conversion* course at Curtin University is also offered in campuses in regional areas: Bentley; Esperance; Geraldton; and Kalgoorlie. At the Bentley campus, the course is targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants who are currently working in early childhood or primary schools and who hold a Certificate III or IV for Education Workers or equivalent. For this cohort, the course duration is specified as two years of full-time study. The Bachelor Institute Program is also offered on a multi-campus basis, as is the University of South Australia’s *Bachelor of Education (External)*, discussed below.

### **Case 3: University of South Australia: *Bachelor of Education (External)***

This four year (full-time equivalent) undergraduate course prepares graduates to become childcare professionals, preschool/kindergarten and junior primary teachers, or for work within related agencies, children's services or schools. The program focuses on planning, implementing and participating in activities for children from birth to eight years of age. It was chosen as a case study because it targets a specific group of student through both external provision and multi-campus delivery.

A similar course can be studied full-time or part-time as an on-campus degree at Magill campus in Adelaide and for this on-campus option there are no prerequisites and mature aged students, TAFE graduates and others with relevant work experience are encouraged to apply. However the course identified here is offered externally only, as a means of improving the access and participation of both Indigenous students and/or students who are working in the childcare field.

This course is also offered in external mode to two distinct groups of students (and only to these students). These two groups are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students in university enclaves (AnTEP); and
- Students who have completed the TAFE Diploma of Children's Services (Childcare) or equivalent).

The ATSI rural university study centres are located at: Ceduna; Mt Gambier; Murray Bridge; Port Augusta; Port Lincoln; and Whyalla.

The course content remains the same for these 'external mode' students as for the on-campus students – except that students working in the field can usually complete at least one of their practicum placements at their place of work.

The numbers involved in this external program are small. The external cohort of TAFE Diploma students is around 20 (full-time equivalent) and the ATSI cohort is around 10 enrolled students in the program overall. The attrition rates are higher than for students undertaking the course on campus. Some 30 per cent of the TAFE external studies students exit the program before completion. Of the ATSI group only 1 or 2 students graduate each year.

The program co-ordinator attributes the high attrition rate to a combination of factors: the demands on the women students in the program – many of whom are mature aged and have family and community responsibilities and are often the only family wage-earner; the inability of the study centre staff to provide adequate support in the particular discipline the student is studying (the staff are not, for example, trained in early-childhood studies); and the lack of resources available for campus-based staff to visit the centres to offer support.

### **Course content**

The program contains the distinct study strands of:

- Child development – studies that enable students to learn and apply information about how children’s emotional, social, thinking, and physical development are intertwined.
- Curriculum studies – designed to develop students’ knowledge and understanding of curriculum content and give students opportunities to develop, implement and evaluate key ideas in a range of curriculum areas and learn about approaches to teaching and children’s learning.
- Communication and “contextual and contrasting studies”, along with electives, which may include children’s literature, physical education and health, cultural studies, languages and Indigenous studies.
- Practicum - described as “the field-based placements that give students the opportunity to combine theory with practice”. Over the four years of the UniSA degree, students participate in four supervised placements, including a total of 22 days in childcare, 25 days in sessional preschool/kindergarten, and 40 days in junior primary schools. Final year students also complete a research project in an unsupervised 15-day placement on a topic and setting of their choice.

## Similar courses

The Double Degree offered by UNE in *Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood)/Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)* is a similar program in that it is designed to meet the needs of VET Diploma holders and is only available by distance with an optional residential school in January. It is targeted at mature age entrants who hold a Children’s Services Diploma and have work experience in an educational or children’s services facility. Most students continue working while undertaking the degree part-time. In effect, the UNE grants two years advanced standing to students holding a Children’s Services Diploma. The *Bachelor of Teaching (EC)* is offered during the first year of study and this qualifies graduates to work in pre-school settings only (ie. 0-5 years). The *Bachelor of Education (EC)* involves an additional year of study and qualifies graduates to work in early childhood settings in primary schools (ie. 0-8 years). While categorised as a double degree, the course is progressive in the sense that it offers students the option to take out a *Bachelor of Teaching (EC)* after one year of equivalent full-time study, and then undertake an additional qualification – the *Bachelor of Education (EC)* – to broaden their qualifications into primary school teaching.

The University of Central Queensland’s *Bachelor of Learning Management (Early Childhood)* is similar in terms of multi-campus delivery but is not targeted specifically to Indigenous students.

The Curtin University *Bachelor of Education Conversion (Early Childhood)* program in Western Australia, provides an interesting point of comparison with the UniSA initiative. The Curtin program offered through its Bentley campus, is designed to enable Aboriginal & Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), working in rural and remote areas, to gain a Bachelor of Education degree through a two-year (full-time equivalent) program. While this course is primarily delivered within the school and community contexts in which the students work and live, it includes a compulsory four week, on-campus, block of study each semester. This on-campus component clearly goes some way to addressing the support issues identified above. However, it presents a new set of access and equity issues

in that, for many women, the option of four weeks per semester out of the community is not a realistic one for those with family and community responsibilities.

It is beyond the scope of this study to adequately assess the potential of these courses to appropriately address the needs of ATSI students and early childhood workers – particularly women from Indigenous communities. These courses are, however, an indication of the innovative approaches taken by Australian higher education institutions to meet Indigenous students' needs.

## **Discussion**

The case studies illustrate the context in which early childhood education courses are structured and the efforts made by some institutions to tailor courses to meet diverse students' needs. While the models illustrated are examples of particular approaches, some institutions offer combinations of these models to maximise access. The following section identifies emerging trends which are illustrated by the case studies.

## **Teacher Education Accreditation**

The presence in most Australian jurisdictions of strong State-wide accreditation bodies provides the framework within which the early childhood management and education units that make up the courses operate. Generally speaking, curriculum content in all the courses currently registered by the various State accreditation bodies, and those courses in which accreditation is pending, falls into four component parts:

- Education studies (including, for example, child development and units on diversity/inclusion)
- Curriculum studies, including, for example, play-based learning in the early years, but also the key learning areas mandated by State education authorities
- Professional care and management studies (for example, working with families)
- Professional experience (practicum).

It is difficult to assess the extent to which studies of Early Childhood pedagogy (0-8) are compromised by the Teacher Registration and Accreditation bodies' requirements. Longer programs of study, such as the 5.5 year *Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) / Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)* program at UWS appear to maintain the integrity of the Early Childhood pedagogy (0-8) within Early Childhood teacher preparation courses.

The professional experience components of these courses generally include provision for students to experience both pre-school early childhood settings and school settings. The length and range of educational settings that make up the professional experience component of registered teaching courses is mandated. These requirements help explain why most undergraduate degree courses are campus-based. In addition, all students in registered early childhood education courses must complete police checks prior to commencing their studies. Without the appropriate police certification, individual students cannot proceed with their course of study as they are unable to undertake the practicum requirements.

While State-based accreditation agencies appear to be influencing the curriculum requirements in Early Childhood courses, individual institutions are being innovative in their program delivery. Trends are identified below.

## **Student-centred course design**

Many courses now offer more integrated ‘on-ramps’ and ‘early exit’ points that provide a range of pathways into, and through, Early Childhood degree programs. Both the UWS and the CQU cases demonstrate the way higher education institutions are developing courses with a range of entry and exit points. These various pathways into courses, and exit points from courses, allow these institutions to better cater to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, including teachers wishing to move into the early childhood field and early childhood workers looking for further professional development in early childhood and school education.

The first two case studies exemplify the flexible approaches being developed to cater for the increasingly diverse student cohorts either wishing to enter the field or who already work in the field and are looking to upgrade or broaden their professional experience. The third case study is targeted specifically at two particular cohorts of students: those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and those holding VET Diplomas. In this case, the University of South Australia’s *Bachelor of Education (External)*, students must study by external mode, but Indigenous students are attached to special regional learning centres.

## **New delivery modes**

As indicated in the list of undergraduate courses in Part B of this report, the majority of Early Childhood courses are offered as on-campus programs. The second case study - the CQU *Bachelor of Learning Management (Early Childhood)* - illustrates a multi-campus delivery mode in which a common course is delivered in six geographically dispersed campuses throughout Central Queensland. As with the UWS example, this course also demonstrates the use of ‘pathways’ and course options to accommodate a greater diversity of student needs within one course.

Institutions offering new modes of delivery face considerable demands, not the least of which is staffing remote regions with qualified personnel. Course co-ordinators mentioned the difficulties of staffing courses delivered in remote and regional locations. Organising the mandatory professional experience component of the course is also more complex when the students are dispersed, particularly now that Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities are mandating the sites for professional experience. The lack of resources is seen as the biggest system failure. As one course convener pointed out,

“We are not offering real opportunities if there is insufficient support. We are providing access but not the opportunity to succeed”.

## **Summary**

Many higher education institutions are developing new approaches to the delivery of Early Childhood Education degrees to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The programs vary considerably in detail, but all have the common feature of enhancing pathways, both into and out of, courses in Early Childhood Education. Programs are now

offered externally and through multiple campuses, and are designed with multiple entry and exit points, as part of a specific strategy to meet the needs of targeted groups, such as students holding VET Diplomas who are working in childcare and Indigenous students.

This review examined the courses and identifies three emerging trends in the areas of:

- Standardised Curriculum design;
- Student-centred course design; and
- New delivery modes.

*Curriculum design* is increasingly influenced by Teacher Education and Accreditation Authorities who have a responsibility to ensure that the unique features of Early Childhood pedagogy (0-8 years) are recognised and included in courses that involve teaching in the early years of primary school. Currently the curricula offered by various institutions, falls into four broad areas:

- Education studies (including, for example, child development and units on diversity/inclusion)
- Curriculum studies, including, for example, play-based learning in the early years, but also the key learning areas mandated by State education authorities
- Professional care and management studies (for example, working with families)
- Professional experience (practicum).

*Student-centred course design* has led to the development of courses that offer integrated ‘on-ramps’ and ‘early exit’ points into and through, Early Childhood degree programs. These various pathways allow these institutions to better cater to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, such as Indigenous students and students entering the program with a VET Diploma in Children’s Services. We identify three distinct pathways models, while illustrating how some institutions combine two or three of these models in developing their student-centred programs:

- A multi-campus course with different entry requirements and delivery modes designed to cater to students who are geographically dispersed;
- An on-campus course with several pathways courses leading into it and multiple early exit points; and
- An external course designed to meet the needs of a specific group of students.

*New delivery modes* are being used to target courses to groups of students who differ from the mainstream intake of Year 12 graduates. Diverse student groups are being given more access to Early Childhood courses through targeted external courses, and courses delivered on multi-campus locations, particularly education facilities in remote and regional communities. Institutions are also offering block residential units of study to students from remote areas. While these programs promote increased access to degree programs, they require higher levels of resourcing and institutions report difficulties in staffing multi-campus programs with qualified personnel. Participation and success rates among students in remotely delivered programs for Indigenous students are reported to be poor.

## Conclusion

Early childhood education is a dynamic field characterised by innovation and change. Many of the institutions offering courses in this field have recently reviewed and revised their course offerings to make them more responsive to, on the one hand, the regulatory requirements now in place in the various State jurisdictions and, on the other hand, the diverse range of student needs.

A range of models have been developed to enhance the delivery of Early Childhood education, particularly to sub-groups of the population such as VET Diploma holders and Indigenous students. With adequate resourcing, the new models of program delivery could be extended to increase the level of participation in Early Childhood degrees and to improve the success rates of students from diverse backgrounds.

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