

EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

(Adopted at AEU Federal Conference 2003 and endorsed by Branch Council June 2003.)

1. PREAMBLE

Education is the key to a more equitable, more democratic society. Quality public education that is available free to all, regardless of background, location and personal resources is the most vital service a society can offer to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential. It is critically important that these opportunities are offered at the earliest stages of people's lives, when life long skills and abilities are being formed, through quality early childhood education.

Investment in quality public education during early childhood reaps significant long term benefits for children, their families and the community.

The value of early childhood education is not just in setting the foundations for cognitive, physical, emotional, social and language development. It is often essential in terms of the detection of impediments to learning, which if not attended to could affect a child's learning potential for the rest of their life.

The AEU recognises that the internationally accepted definition of early childhood education encompasses children aged 0 to 8. This policy focuses on the preschool year/s of early childhood education. It should be noted that ages and entry levels to preschool education differ across the states and territories.

Early childhood education occurs within a range of settings. This provision spans the disciplines of education and care of young children.

During the last decade the employment of early childhood teachers in a range of settings has been steadily increasing. This range of settings includes:

- early childhood education settings which incorporate preschools; kindergartens; and early childhood education units which may or may not be integrated with primary and secondary schools;
- junior primary or infant schools;
- childcare settings which cover long day care, family day care, occasional care, toy libraries for preschool aged children and out of school hours and vacation programs for school aged children;
- early intervention programs for children with special needs.

The Commonwealth ceased funding pre-compulsory early childhood education in 1985. Impediments to quality care and education due to the existence of different arrangements across systems remain. Funding cuts have had a direct and negative impact on the provision of early childhood education in some states/territories.

The AEU acknowledges historical inconsistencies at the national level and across state and territory systems that have given rise to diversity and fragmentation. Recent emerging trends in the delivery of education programs in a variety of settings require the AEU to articulate a framework for the provision of high quality public preschool education for all within an overall framework of early childhood education.

It is essential within this context that the Commonwealth shares responsibility with the states and territories for ensuring the delivery of a high quality public early childhood education to all children in Australia.

2. PRINCIPLES

The AEU declares that:

- 2.1 A quality preschool education provides lasting benefits for children's development and futures.
- 2.2 All children have the right to free, public, high quality preschool education.
- 2.3 Preschool education must be an integral part of the early childhood education offered by a high quality, properly resourced system of public education.
- 2.4 The Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the states and territories, must take a responsibility for funding and planning public preschool education accessible to all children in Australia.
- 2.5 A national plan must be developed for preschool education by the Commonwealth Government in partnership with the states and territories, the AEU and other relevant stakeholders.
- 2.6 All children in Australia must have equitable access to public preschool education for *at least* one year prior to attending school as a minimum provision.
- 2.7 Preschool is a vital component of the education continuum and specific strategies are required to ensure that the links between preschool and school education are strong and are supported.
- 2.8 The creation and retention of partnerships with parents is a positive and important element in the provision of early childhood education.
- 2.9 The AEU recognises that the education and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children takes place in many settings other than schools and childcare centres. Therefore the transition from home to childcare and early childhood education must be an ongoing experience which allows for the recognition of a variety of cultural backgrounds, different learning styles and a range of home environments.

Early childhood education must recognise and affirm the cultural knowledge, language and values of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- 2.10 All teachers and education workers in early childhood education have the right to appropriate recognition, remuneration, career paths and status and proper industrial representation through registered unions to ensure the protection of industrial rights.
- 2.11 Early childhood education, including preschool education, must be delivered by qualified early childhood teachers and education workers and appropriate registration and accreditation procedures must be adopted.

3. QUALITY

- 3.1 Quality early childhood education is characterised by appropriate child teacher ratios and group sizes, appropriately qualified and trained teachers and education workers, and enriching, well equipped, caring and secure environments in approved and accredited locations, all of which should be defined and enforced by regulation.
- 3.2 Early childhood education should be coordinated and delivered by qualified early childhood teachers in developmentally appropriate, educationally sound, and

culturally inclusive learning environments.

- 3.3 Quality preschool education actively engages parents in the expanding development of their children, in acknowledgement of their critical role, rights and needs in caring for and educating their children.
- 3.4 A quality preschool education reflects a belief in the uniqueness of childhood by respecting children as they are now and who they are right now.

4. ACCESS

- 4.1 Public preschool education must be free and equitably accessible to all eligible children in Australia irrespective of their location or background.
- 4.2 Capacity to pay must not be a barrier to access to preschool education and the reliance in some systems on parental contributions and fundraising for basic resources must be eliminated.
- 4.3 Universal access to at least one year of preschool education prior to school is recognised to be a minimum entitlement. Policy should be developed to extend such access to two years, consistent with the 2001 OECD Thematic Review report's finding that the overall OECD trend is aiming to give all children at least two years of free publicly funded provision before beginning compulsory schooling.
- 4.4 States and territories currently offering access to more than one year of preschool must at least maintain this existing provision.
- 4.5 The Commonwealth Government in partnership with the States and Territories must establish preschool attendance of *at least* an initial ten hours per week as the minimum entitlement for all children in Australia for at least the year prior to entering school.
- 4.6 The national policy framework should include determination of the optimum weekly attendance time for each child and develop strategies and time lines to ensure movement towards that optimum. States and Territories currently offering more than the proposed minimum should maintain their existing provision.
- 4.7 More strategic support and interventions in early childhood education are necessary in order to give young children and their families the care and development they need. This early support will ensure that potentially disadvantaged children are better prepared for schooling. It will prevent the costly remedial work that would otherwise have to be carried out in later years.
- 4.8 Barriers to access for disadvantaged groups, children with special needs and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds must be identified and addressed.
- 4.9 Development of a national data base on provision of and participation in preschool should give a particular focus to the identification of the barriers to access for individual children with special needs and for disadvantaged groups.
- 4.10 A national picture of programs and supports currently offered by individual states and territories for children identified as disadvantaged or with special needs must be developed, with a view to identifying gaps and under-resourcing as well as exemplary models which have the potential to deliver quality education.
- 4.11 The Commonwealth Government, in funding partnership with the states and territories, must develop and fund a Preschool Equity Program to ensure that all children have access to high quality preschool and that their special educational

needs are addressed.

- 4.12 Within the framework of a national Preschool Equity Program, the Commonwealth Government must retain responsibility for the provision of targeted funding for preschool places and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

5. CURRICULUM

- 5.1 The AEU believes that early childhood education curriculum should be based on a developmentally appropriate model that responds to:
- knowledge about how children learn;
 - knowledge of the individual differences of children;
 - the need to provide continuity of learning experiences across, between and within all settings of early childhood education.
- 5.2 Developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum should display the following characteristics:
- 5.2.1 attention to how young children learn through teaching strategies which include observing, modelling, facilitating, supporting and challenging them as learners;
- 5.2.2 progression from early to middle childhood;
- 5.2.3 a view of learning as an integrated active and interactive process in which the learner constructs his or her own understanding;
- 5.2.4 a valuing of the gender, experiences, language and cultures of all children;
- 5.2.5 recognition that learning takes place in a context where social, cultural and gender related factors have an influence.
- 5.3 Curriculum frameworks and programs must be child focused and reflect the centrality of play in children's learning.
- 5.4 A national policy framework for preschool education must be developed within an overall policy perspective on early childhood education. This should take into account both the pedagogy of preschool education and the curriculum frameworks of the early primary years and provide for articulation between them.
- 5.5 Recognised models of good practice in relation to quality preschool curriculum and transition programs should be investigated and disseminated.
- 5.6 Exemplary models and innovation in relation to the enhancement of partnerships between educators and parents in democratic and inclusive decision making and in the education of young children should be investigated and disseminated and adopted where applicable.
- 5.7 The AEU acknowledges the existence of outcome based curriculum in whatever format across the states and territories for the compulsory years of early childhood education. It also asserts that early childhood learning is holistic in approach, taking as its focus a developmentally appropriate methodology and contextually appropriate strategies. Within this context the AEU opposes assessment driven curriculum in early childhood.

Further the AEU is opposed to standardised systemic assessment.

6. LITERACY AND NUMERACY

6.1 Literacy and numeracy are usually integrated within the context of the whole curriculum in Early Childhood and are not usually taught as separate entities. The AEU recognises the importance of literacy and numeracy skill development within early childhood settings and reiterates that early childhood programs will reflect the centrality of play in children's learning.

6.2 The AEU defines literacy as 'the ability to compose and comprehend spoken, written and visual text for a range of purposes and in a range of social contexts'. Active and critical literacy enables people to know about and use language to enhance their capacity to think, create, question and analyse in order to be able to take part in social action and to participate fully and effectively in society.

Numeracy involves an understanding of and capacity to use number, measurement, data and space to meet the demands of life - at home, in education, in paid work, and for participation in community and civic life.

6.3 The AEU acknowledges that effective teachers will use a range and variety of strategies in the teaching of literacy and numeracy and these strategies acknowledge that children have a diversity of learning styles. The AEU also acknowledges that ongoing assessment, evaluation and reporting occurs in developmentally appropriate ways and that effective teachers continually employ successful methodologies in their educational programs. Intervention strategies and techniques are part of this process.

6.4 Assessment instruments must be; based on teacher professional judgement, developmentally appropriate to the child being assessed and integrated into teaching practice, with adequate external support to ensure that teachers remain in control of their workloads.

6.5 The AEU asserts that teachers must be supported at all levels with the resources needed.

6.6 The AEU reiterates its position that increased funding should be directed to the early years of education as the most effective strategy to maintain and improve standards of literacy and numeracy. Such funding should provide:

6.6.1 targeted early literacy and numeracy programs;

6.6.2 suitable and appropriate technology resources for both teaching and learning;

6.6.3 effective, meaningful and accredited professional development;

6.6.4 adequate resources including appropriate time release to allow cooperative and collaborative planning and programming.

7. CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

In order for students with additional educational needs to participate in a full educational program it is essential that appropriate, and in many cases, additional resources are made available including: access to specialised multidisciplinary services; professional support staff; trained teachers aides/assistants; professional development; and appropriate industrial support. Additional resources should be maintained at levels commensurate with the needs of the child.

8. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EARLY CHILDHOOD

EDUCATION

- 8.1 The AEU acknowledges the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples which highlight the lower number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who attend early childhood education and recommends that this be addressed as a strategy to increase the educational success of Aboriginal Students. The AEU will pursue the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the three reports.
- 8.2 All education systems should have as their objective the achievement of participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early childhood education for a period similar to that for all children in Australia. In remote localities specific attention should be given to the provision of early childhood education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- 8.3 All providers of early childhood education have an ongoing obligation to provide for the intellectual, cultural, social and emotional development of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and must recognise that central to learning for Aboriginal children is a focus on identity and self-determination.
- 8.4 Providers of early childhood education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should:
 - 8.4.1 Ensure staffing policies give priority to appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are enrolled;
 - 8.4.2 Adopt measures to include and appropriately remunerate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members delivering cultural programs;
 - 8.4.3 Provide professional development activities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and counter racism for all staff;
 - 8.4.4 Appropriate and sensitive cultural orientation to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a prerequisite for all workers in all children's services;
 - 8.4.5 Adopt teaching practices which recognise, value and utilise the student's first languages; and Aboriginal English/Kriol and Torres Strait Islander Kriol;
 - 8.4.6 Provide environments in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents feel welcome and encouraged to be involved in the education program; and
 - 8.4.7 Adopt practices which maximise the co-ordination of early childhood education programs with health services and nutrition education programs.
- 8.5 The delivery of care and education must be culturally inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies.

9. STAFF-STUDENT RATIOS

- 9.1 There is a significant body of research which shows the importance of group size and staff-children ratios to the outcomes of early childhood education. The AEU believes that an appropriate ratio is one trained teacher to every ten 4 year old children in preschool education.
- 9.2 There are currently no national standards for group size or staff ratios in preschool education, unlike the standards established for long day care centres. The reality

across Australia is that there is no consistency of group sizes or staff-children ratios. It is recognised that the establishment of initial national standards must reflect the current realities in seeking to move towards more optimal levels.

- 9.3 As a national standard, staffing of preschool education must be based on actual enrolments at the beginning of the year with a capacity to increase staffing levels should enrolments increase throughout the year.
- 9.4 A minimum national standard must be set as a matter of urgency to establish staff student ratios of 2:20 for all preschool education programs for 4 year old children, including at least one qualified early childhood teacher.
- 9.5 Where preschools offer programs for 3 year olds, the minimum national standard for staff student ratios must be 2:15, comprising one qualified early childhood teacher and one aide/assistant.
- 9.6 Where the minimum staff student ratio comprises one qualified early childhood teacher and one assistant, group sizes for 4 year olds programs must be restricted to a maximum of 20.
- 9.7 Group sizes and staff-children ratios must be adjusted in special settings and/or where children with special needs are included, to ensure that children's special educational needs are met.
- 9.8 A national standard must be set to establish a maximum case load of 50 in the interim for all preschool teachers, to be reduced to 40 as the national staff student ratio is implemented. This national standard should be reviewed in line with increasing provision and changing patterns of delivery.
- 9.9 States and territories currently offering teaching and learning conditions above the proposed minimum national standards should be required to at least maintain their existing provision.
- 9.10 Funding agreements to be established between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories must ensure compliance with national standards on staff student ratios, group sizes and teacher case loads on an agreed time line. Progress should be reviewed at the end of three years with the view to establishing new and improved ratio targets. It is noted that staff student ratios and other standards also remain the province of both national and state/territory industrial negotiations with the AEU and any other relevant unions.
- 9.11 National standards relating to staff student ratios, group sizes and teacher case loads for preschool programs must apply to all locations in which such programs are funded and/or receive state registration/licensing.

10. QUALIFICATIONS

- 10.1 All workers in early childhood education should be appropriately qualified for the roles and tasks that are performed in the settings in which early childhood education is provided.
- 10.2 All early childhood teachers must have pre-service education and access to appropriate and accredited professional development.
 - 10.2.1 Pre-service qualifications should be the equivalent of four years of training, inclusive of any recognition of prior learning. Teachers should be allowed access to four year training through the recognition of prior learning and competence.

- 10.2.2 Pre-service teacher education programs should include significant and assessable mandatory units in the areas of Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
- 10.2.3 Teachers from other education sectors should be provided with the relevant professional development and training to enable them to teach in early childhood settings.
- 10.3 Early childhood education workers should have access to a range of nationally accredited courses which provide credentials that recognise the important and evolving role they play.
- In addition there should be articulated and accredited pathways for early childhood education workers to seek further relevant qualifications, including to teacher status.
- 10.4 The AEU opposes the use of private providers for early childhood teacher education and teacher aides/assistants' training.
- 10.5 The AEU supports the recommendation of the 1996 Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee report, for the development of a draft set of national goals and guidelines for best practice in the pre-service education and training of early childhood practitioners, which should highlight the importance of working closely with parents. Such guidelines should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders, and the proposed Education Commission be given carriage of this development.
- 10.6 Agreed mechanisms which ensure proper registration and accreditation procedures must be adopted for all early childhood education teachers and education workers.

11. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 11.1 It is the responsibility of education systems in consultation with teachers and early childhood education workers to provide professional development opportunities. Professional development opportunities are to be provided by appropriately qualified people. All teachers and early childhood education workers must be able to access this professional development in order to keep abreast of educational research, practice and technological change.
- 11.2 All early childhood teachers and workers must have access to a minimum of ten days funded professional development each year within employed hours.
- 11.3 Education systems have a responsibility to ensure that all teachers and early childhood education workers undertake professional development in the areas of Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies, including cross-cultural awareness, teaching and learning, language, literacy and numeracy; and that resources are provided to ensure this occurs.
- 11.4 The AEU supports the recommendation of the 1996 Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee to include in the [then] National Professional Development Program the in-service of qualified early childhood practitioners. This principle of inclusion should apply to any national professional development programs.
- 11.5 Early childhood educators' networks must be funded and supported to ensure that information, strategies, experiences and resources can be shared and educational innovations disseminated.

12. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS

- 12.1 The Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments must affirm their commitment to universal access to preschool education for all children in Australia for at least one year before school.
- 12.2 In partnership with the states and territories, the Commonwealth Government as a matter of national urgency must assume a responsibility for preschool education to ensure that all children in Australia have access to a high quality, free public preschool education before starting school. This includes both a Commonwealth contribution to the funding of public preschool education and the development of a national framework for early childhood education.
- 12.3 In partnership with the states and territories, the AEU and other relevant stakeholders, the Commonwealth Government must develop a national plan for preschool education, including national goals, standards and a policy framework for preschool education within an overall policy perspective on public education.
- 12.4 The development of a national framework for preschool education must be coordinated through MCEETYA and this should include consideration of the development of a common framework for departmental responsibility over time.
- 12.5 The Department of Education in each state and territory should be the single agency responsible for preschool education in each system. This is currently the case in most Australian systems in whole or in part and reflects the OECD trend towards closer cooperation between preschool and compulsory education.
- 12.6 A representative national Education Commission must be established to provide advice on education, including preschool education within the overall framework of early childhood education.
- 12.7 The AEU supports the 1996 recommendation of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee for the establishment of a National Centre for Research in Early Childhood Development, Education and Care and urges its establishment through the Minister for Education Science and Training. One of its urgent tasks would be to establish a consistent and reliable data base on the provision of and participation in preschool education and other early childhood services.
- 12.8 The AEU supports the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee's proposal for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to devise consistent nomenclature and descriptors for the years of early childhood education as well as common starting ages for schooling.

13. THE LINK BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

- 13.1 Preschool education is a vital part of the education continuum and national policy frameworks and structures should be framed within an overall perspective on early childhood education. The importance of the link between the provision of preschool and school education cannot be overstated. However, effective relationships between preschool education and other services for young children are also important in ensuring the best possible opportunities are provided for children and families.
- 13.2 Flexible transition arrangements from childcare to preschools and kindergartens, and from preschools and kindergartens to schools, should recognise various developmentally appropriate factors as they affect individual children. Care must be taken to ensure that the availability of flexible transition options does not lead to

very young children being placed in services that could not provide appropriate programs normally provided to children of similar ages.

- 13.3 Where these do not exist, links must be established between preschool education and school education, including the development of transition programs, early childhood curriculum guidelines, networks and, where possible, integration or co-location of preschools with primary schools.
- 13.4 Where the establishment of co-located or integrated models of service provision is proposed, whether they be preschool/ childcare, preschool/school or a combination of both, the quality and integrity of preschool programs shall not be compromised as a result of such models. Government agencies involved in the establishment of such settings must consult with the relevant stakeholders, particularly the AEU, prior to the establishment of such settings to ensure that the requirements of high quality preschool provision and relevant industrial conditions are met.
- 13.5 Provision of public preschool education programs must not be compromised by the introduction of competitive services, particularly those facilitated by public funding mechanisms which may be implemented to the detriment of public preschool provision for example, in terms of enrolments, staffing levels and public preschool education resource allocations.
- 13.6 The Commonwealth, in partnership with the states and territories, must investigate and make available to all systems information about existing links between early childhood education and child care, and provide models for how such links should ensure that the best possible educational practice is paramount in the early childhood education sector.
- 13.7 The AEU will seek to work with all stakeholders to ensure that the structures of early childhood education and children's services develop in ways which value, respect and meet the needs of children, families, teachers, workers in children's services and the Australian community.

14. FUNDING ISSUES

- 14.1 The overall national investment on preschool education must be increased to ensure that all children in Australia have access to a high quality public preschool education which meets agreed national standards. The AEU notes that most OECD countries spend between 0.4% and 0.6% of GDP on preschool education. Australia, at 0.03%, is 26th of 28 countries.
- 14.2 Funding must be adequate to guarantee a quality preschool education, including:
 - provision of appropriate learning and teaching conditions such as group sizes, staff-children ratios and other agreed national standards;
 - appropriate facilities for the achievement of an optimum learning environment and to meet the standards of Occupational Health and Safety regulations;
 - indexation of funding to cover the salaries and professional development of workers and meet the requirements of children with special needs-
- 14.3 The AEU notes that since 1985 childcare has been funded by the Commonwealth and early childhood education has principally been funded by state and territory governments. This means that the Commonwealth plays an important role in all other sectors of education, but not in the very vital preschool years.
- 14.4 In partnership with the states and territories, the Commonwealth Government must

assume a responsibility for preschool education. This includes a Commonwealth contribution to the funding of public preschool education.

14.5 Defined Commonwealth and State and Territory roles should be negotiated within a new funding and policy partnership aimed at delivering universal, free, public preschool education of the highest quality for all children in Australia.

14.6 The principles for cooperative Commonwealth- state/territory funding arrangements for the next triennium are:

14.6.1 provision by the Commonwealth Government of a block grant to the states and territories, comprising:

- a) a base block grant allocated on the basis of the proportion of 4 year olds enrolled in preschool education
- b) a grant within the framework of a national Preschool Equity Program based on the numbers of children identified as disadvantaged or having special needs, targeted both at increasing participation and at redressing disadvantage/ meeting special educational needs.

14.6.2 a commitment by the states and territories to maintain and increase their total funding contribution to preschool education.

14.6.3 provision of additional funding by the Commonwealth Government on a cost share basis with the states/territories to provide for the establishment of appropriate national infrastructure:

- a) National Centre for Research in Early Childhood Development, Education and Care
- b) inclusion of preschool education within the framework of early childhood education as part of the brief of a representative Education Commission
- c) inclusion of preschool teachers in a re-established National Professional Development Program
- d) development of Early Childhood Education networks to provide all early childhood educators with a forum for information sharing, advice, support, and innovation
- e) inclusion of preschool education within the role of MCEETYA.

14.6.4 Funding agreements should determine the specific responsibilities of each level of government in the development of a national system of preschool education, including movement towards agreed national standards and frameworks and the achievement of additional places and enhanced participation rates.

The AEU opposes any attempt by state and territory governments to substitute state funding with Commonwealth funding in an attempt to abrogate responsibility for the funding of early childhood education, thus providing "cheaper" service delivered by State governments.

15. INDUSTRIAL ISSUES

15.1 Early childhood education has a predominantly female work force. Equity issues relevant to the extreme sex-segregation within Australia's workforce are of paramount importance in this area. Emphasis needs to be given industrially and

professionally to improving the recognition and status of workers in early childhood education.

- 15.2 Appropriate recognition, remuneration, career paths and status of early childhood teachers and education workers must be pursued. This includes parity of salary and conditions with other education sectors, irrespective of the location or centre type in which preschool education is provided.
- 15.3 Appropriate negotiation and consultative mechanisms should be available to ensure that employees participate in the making of decisions that affect them.
- 15.4 The AEU will work to ensure that the rights of teachers and early childhood education workers are protected and improved and will seek to cooperate with all unions involved where there is a need for common bargaining.
- 15.5 The AEU strongly opposes the trend to increased casualisation and other forms of precarious employment in at least some systems.
- 15.6 The AEU disagrees vehemently with the practice of employing teachers as childcare workers in order to utilise their professional skills as teachers whilst remunerating them at levels that do not reflect the work undertaken.
- 15.7 The AEU believes that it is appropriate for it, as an education union, to cover teachers and early childhood education workers employed in the following settings:
 - 15.7.1 preschools, kindergartens and early childhood education units which may or may not be integrated with primary and secondary schools;
 - 15.7.2 junior primary or infant schools;
 - 15.7.3 childcare settings which cover long day care, family day care, occasional care, toy libraries for preschool aged children and out of school hours and vacation programs for school aged children;
 - 15.7.4 early intervention programs for children with special needs.

16. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- 16.1 Information technology in early childhood education must be designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning for children and allows teachers to manage their work in more effective and efficient ways.
- 16.2 Early childhood teachers should have access to appropriate IT specialist and qualified support staff, including experienced school-based teachers of information technology and information technology technical support persons as appropriate.
- 16.3 At least 12 hours information technology professional development should be provided per annum for early childhood teachers, directed at an individual needs level.
- 16.4 Where system expectations require information technology assessment reporting, early childhood staff should be provided with support and time off class to achieve this.
- 16.5 Early childhood teachers should each be provided with an up-to-date computer and printer and a personal email address and ready access to the Internet.

EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTION PLAN

1. PRIORITIES

The AEU's National Early Childhood Committee has developed an action plan to achieve the AEU's priorities in the provision of preschool education as part of the public education system.

1. **For** the Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the states and territories through the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), to assume a responsibility for funding and planning of public preschool education.
2. **Pursue** the development of a national plan for preschool education by the Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the states and territories, the AEU and other stakeholders, to include national goals, standards and a coherent policy framework for preschool education within an overall policy perspective on public education.
3. **Lobby** for all children in Australia to have equitable access to free, public, high quality preschool education for *at least* one year prior to attending school as a minimum provision.
4. **Ensure** that early childhood education affirms the cultural knowledge, language and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and provides for their development, recognising that central to learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their parents, primary care givers and communities is a focus on identity and self-determination.
5. **Address** barriers to access for disadvantaged groups, children with special needs and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
6. **Increase** community awareness of the importance of preschool education through building community coalitions in order to highlight the critical foundations of learning provided by preschools in the continuum of education.
7. **Promote** high quality public provision, including appropriate teacher and allied staff ratios, group sizes, employment of qualified early childhood teachers and education workers and enriching and well-resourced environments.
8. **Campaign** for appropriate recognition, remuneration, career paths and status for early childhood teachers and education workers and ensure parity of salaries and conditions with other education sectors.
9. **Monitor and protect** the integrity, standards, quality, industrial conditions, qualifications in relation to preschool provision linked to other services for young children.
10. **Oppose** the privatisation of preschool education.
11. **Maintain and develop** a research base which will inform the development of policy and strategies.

2. ACTION

In order to achieve this priorities the following actions should take place:

Federally

1. That the AEU host national seminars around the key issues in the AEU Early Childhood Education policy in order to engage key stakeholders in an ongoing dialogue around these issues.
2. That the AEU actively lobby the Federal Government seeking to gain commitments to the priorities and initiatives outlined in the AEU policy.
3. That the AEU seek to influence and obtain commitments from other political parties to implement the priorities and initiatives outlined in the AEU policy.
4. That the AEU seek to build active community networks with parents, academics and the community to facilitate discussion regarding the proposed national plan and in order to progress the achievement of our policy goals.
5. That the AEU seek to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and education workers, parents and primary caregivers and communities in order to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to early childhood education which affirms their cultural knowledge, language and values and enables them to participate effectively in broader Australian society.
6. That the AEU undertake research which informs the ongoing development of policy and strategies.
7. That the AEU promote the national Early Childhood Education Policy and related issues in appropriate external forums such as conferences and meetings.
8. That the AEU include information relating to the policy and related issues on its website and in other forms of communication.

At State and Territory Levels

1. That Branches and Associated Bodies continue to actively engage members and key stakeholders in state/territory level forums through discussions of the issues and strategies linked to the National Policy and to seek opportunities to promote the AEU's policy in any relevant forums external to the AEU.
2. That Branches bring the policy to the attention of principals, teachers, education workers and their professional associations in order for them to be informed and to draw the issues to the attention of parents, the community and government.
3. That Branches and Associated Bodies actively lobby state and territory governments seeking to gain commitments to the priorities and initiatives outlined in the national AEU Early Childhood Education policy.
4. That Branches and Associated Bodies seek to influence and obtain commitments from other political parties to implement the priorities and initiatives outlined in the national AEU Early Childhood Education policy.
5. That Branches and Associated Bodies use the AEU's policy as a organising/recruitment tool and therefore develop a specific recruitment plan targeted at workers involved in early childhood education.
6. That Branches and Associated Bodies seek to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and education workers, parents and primary caregivers and communities in order to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to early childhood education which affirms their cultural knowledge, language and values and enables them to participate effectively in broader Australian society.
7. That Branches and Associated Bodies assist in the development of national research and data bases.

- 8 That the AEU National Early Childhood Committee assist in the implementation of the campaign through the State/Territory representatives working at the Branch /Associated Body level.