The Development of Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia

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Australia is a vast country. It is the largest country in Oceania and the sixth largest country in the world by total area. The Commonwealth of Australia comprises 6 states and 2 territories with a total population of over 25 million people, mainly focused down the south-eastern coast line and concentrated in the capital cities of each state and territory. With respect to early childhood education and care (ECEC), the development of services across the country has changed considerably over time. From families making their own informal care arrangements decades ago, to the more recent era where the Federal government has widened and increased access to ECEC with the aim to raise the quality of children's learning and development outcomes. Using readily available government documents, this article follows the development of ECEC in Australia from its informal beginnings to recent times where the sector has been through a reform phase resulting in the National Quality Framework (NQF) guiding the nation's ECEC quality agenda. With a view to higher educational outcomes leading to better employment and advancement in social conditions, there remain considerable obstacles to realizing a full and seamless quality implementation. In this article, we discuss some of the challenges that lay ahead for ECEC in Australia, and provide some suggestions on how these challenges can be addressed.

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Introduction

Towards the turn of the century, countries across the world, including Australia, were responding to the growing awareness that experiences during the early childhood years impacted children's later learning and development (Barnett, 1995). Poor educational outcomes were already recognized as a weight on the performance of the workforce (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). Heckman's equation of "*Investment + Development + Sustainability = Gain*" has transformed the thinking concerning early childhood from a "cost" to society to an "investment" for the future (Heckman, 2011; Heckman & Lochner, 2000). As an economist, Heckman was responding to the findings of the Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993) and the Abecedarian Project in North Carolina (Ramey, McGinness, Cross, Collier, & Barrie-Blackley, 1982). These longitudinal U.S. research projects provided evidence of increased educational outcomes, job security and increased earnings, affecting expenditure and wealth within disadvantaged communities years later after early childhood interventions had occurred.

These studies and Heckman's interpretation of them had repercussions internationally, contributing to the development of new policy initiatives focused on lifelong learning, from the early years through until the later years (see Table 1 below). Consequently, many countries, including Australia, began to frame policies that directly addressed the need to invest in education from the start of life. It has been said that investing in early childhood education and care provides a strong return, up to 2–4 times the cost, and substantially more

Table 1:   Policy Initiatives Focused on Life-long Learning

Date	Country	Policy Initiatives
1997	Taiwan	Education reform action plan
1998	Finland	Learning is fun: The learning through life policy
1998	Holland	The new policy in Holland: Life-long learning
1998	England	The learning age
2000	Hong Kong	Learning for life, Learning through life: Reform proposals for the Hong Kong education system
2002	Canada	Knowledge has a price: The skills and learning of Canadians
2003	Australia	Life-long learning in Australia

when programs are focused on families with children who are experiencing vulnerability (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017). The term "child care" gave way to "early childhood education" (Heckman, 2011), now referred to in Australia as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

Australia is a diverse nation, with more than 300 languages spoken. It is a fast-changing, ever-expanding, culturally diverse nation with increasing variety in terms of country of birth, languages spoken, and religious affiliation or secular beliefs (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016). The proportion of people born in China and India has increased since 2011 from 6% to 8.3% (China) and from 5.6% to 7.4% (India). Data from the 2016 Australian Census shows that 1.3 million new migrants have come to call Australia home since 2011, from some 180 countries, with China at 191,000 and India at 163,000 being the most common countries of birth of the new arrivals (ABS, 2016). Australia's major capital cities are now culturally diverse with almost one-third born overseas. Some 17% of the Australian population originates from the U.K., 9% from New Zealand, 3% from the Philippines, 3% from Vietnam, 2% from Italy, and 2% from both South Africa and Malaysia. Mandarin has now overtaken Italian as the second most popular language spoken at home, after English, while 21% of Australian families speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2016).

Along with the challenge of diversity in cultures and languages spoken at home, the vastness of the country sees a population, while concentrated in the capital cities of states and territories, spreading thinly across rural and remote areas of the country. These communities do not fare well when it comes to the provision of education, health and other social services. How best to provide ECEC services to families in remote and rural areas remains an issue throughout Australia (Baxter & Hand, 2013; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP], 2014). Many rural districts face high levels of unemployment and a lack of public transport, with families having to travel long distances for their children to attend school or early childhood settings, with a limited choice of services, such as specialist intervention services.

Accountability and Moving Towards a National Quality Agenda

With respect to ECEC, government provision in Australia during the years before children start school is a relatively recent innovation. Traditionally, children were cared for

in informal ways, by baby-sitters, family members (typically grandparents), friends, or mothers staying at home until their children started school. There were care facilities at the beginning of the last century, mainly provided by philanthropic organizations, such as the church and community groups, with local councils and state and territory governments providing education and care in the latter part of the last century (Brennan, 1998). The involvement of the Australian Federal Government in the funding of early child care has only been available since 1972, after the introduction of the *Child Care Act* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1972). At that time, this portfolio was placed in the national Federal Department of Family and Community Services. Settings providing care for young children were required to meet certain standards of health and safety, and they obtained and renewed their license at regular intervals.

Quality in child care became a focus of governments in the late 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, a National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) was ministerially appointed to oversee the new Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) process (NCAC, 2001). The NCAC was created to implement a national, compulsory, quality assurance system for all child care services. The quality assurance scheme developed into the QIAS (NCAC, 2001) featuring 52 principles of quality, comprising the ratings: high quality, good quality, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory. This was the first time in the country quality of practice was linked to government funding, the payment of the Child Care Benefit paid to early childhood services depending on the service rating (Rowe, Tainton, & Taylor, 2006).

Under the QIAS (NCAC, 2001), early childhood teachers and educators were accountable for their practice in different ways from the past, benchmarking practice against the 52 principles of quality (Kilderry, 2015).

In their report, prepared for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Press and Hayes (2000) noted that the increase in numbers of young children in care reflected the need for women to join the workforce after childbirth, to support the family income, coupled with the rising awareness of gender equality and feminism. At this time, there was a necessity to meet family needs rather than focusing on children's education and developmental needs. They pointed out that at this time it was not unusual to find vastly different curriculum approaches in schools, preschools and long day care (LDC) settings with states and territories individually responsible for education and care programs. In addition, they said that while initiatives and reviews were aimed at promoting more consistent practices across ECEC settings, the divide between education

(school-based) and care (prior-to-school) was still being maintained and the desirability of an early childhood curriculum was not universally accepted. Many feared either a "push down" from the school curriculum into ECEC settings, or the reverse with schools initiating "play-based" programs for their new school entrants.

Staff-to-child ratios differed across settings and jurisdictions and there was no requirement for all staff members to hold an ECEC qualification (Rush, 2006). Indeed, training was located at certificate, diploma and advanced diploma levels in community services, as well as degree-educated teachers working in preschools. However, small staff-to-child ratios and higher qualified staff increased the cost to the service and were less likely to be instigated. Press and Hayes (2000) confirmed that ECEC in Australia was at a crossroads at the turn of the century.

During the years that followed, two major longitudinal research studies, Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004) in England and some years later, the Effective Early Educational Experiences for Kids (E4Kids) (Tayler, 2016), a study conducted in Australia, have had, and continue to have, a significant and positive impact on the provision of ECEC in Australia. A significant milestone in Australia's ECEC policy history, shaped by research findings, is the development of the National Quality Framework (NQF) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2018a). The NQF was the result of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, where the aim was to ensure that all children would have access to a quality early childhood education program that would provide better educational and developmental outcomes (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009).

The NQF policy now includes a number of initiatives, including the National Law and National Regulations, the National Quality Standard (NQS), and a national approved learning framework (ACECQA, 2012, 2018a). A significant policy milestone was the introduction of Australia's first mandated framework for all young children (birth to 5 years of age), entitled *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). The EYLF was followed in 2012 with the establishment of the Federal Government agency, the ACECQA. In addition, a new requirement was legislated, where all early childhood staff members were required to hold a minimum of a certificate level qualification or be undertaking a qualification before being employed in an early childhood setting. This policy initiative aimed to deliver better quality services and promote positive education and

development outcomes for all Australian children attending LDC, family day care, outside school hours care and preschool. The NQF aims included (ACECQA, 2017):

- To ensure better qualified staff and improve staff-to-child ratios that enable more quality time to focus on individual children;
- To provide national uniform standards in education, health and safety, physical environment and staffing;
- To introduce a new transparent assessment and ratings system that enables parents to compare services easily and make informed choices about which service best meets their child's needs.

However, despite the increase of national policy initiatives raising the quality of care and education, there remains a great deal of variation in the way in which ECEC is governed across the country. This is largely due to historical, political and legislative environments that include different education systems, processes and policies in the various states and territories (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017). The complexity becomes clear when the diversity of provision across the nation is identified. For example, ECEC is provided through kindergartens, stand-alone preschools, LDC settings and early learning centers, as well as preschool programs within LDC, preschool programs within independent schools and, depending on the state or territory, preschool programs within government schools. Programs in Australia tend to be delivered along two broad models — one a predominantly government model and the other a predominantly non-government model (Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 490). Further distinctions need to be made between preschools and LDC settings.

The *Report on Government Services 2008* describes preschool education as comprising:

> services usually provided by a qualified teacher on a sessional basis in dedicated preschools. Preschool programs or curricula may also be provided in long day care centres and other settings. These services are primarily aimed at children in the year before they commence full time schooling. (SCRGSP, 2008, p. 3.3)

> Long Day Care (LDC) is a centre-based form of child care service. LDC services provide quality all-day or part-time care for children of working families and the general community (services may cater to specific groups within the general community). (Department of Education and Training, n.d., p. 1)

However, since the introduction of the NQS (ACECQA, 2012), all settings, preschool and LDC are now required to offer an educational program as they are to meet Quality Area (QA) 1 "Educational program and practice" as part of their assessment and rating procedure.

Policy Reform and Quality Agendas

The NQS (ACECQA, 2018a, pp. 92–312) is a key aspect of the NQF and sets a national benchmark for ECEC services in Australia. This latest version of the NQS was revised in 2017 after feedback from the assessment and rating process identified duplication in some of the elements. Over time, every early childhood service across the country will be assessed and rated against the NQS. To ensure children are provided with quality learning and development opportunities in the early years before they start school, the NQS encourages continuous improvement in quality and services are supported to develop a Quality Improvement Plan. As the NQS progresses, early childhood services across the country are assessed and rated to make certain they meet the NQS. The results of the assessment and ratings for each service are reported on the Australian Government website (mychild.gov.au). The NQS is implemented through an assessment and ratings process (ACECQA, 2018a, pp. 314–353) that comprises 7 QAs (shown in Table 2). These QAs are made up of 15 standards and 40 elements (Raban, 2017).

Table 2:   Quality Areas, Standards and Elements

Quality area	Standards	Elements
Educational program and practice	3	9
Children's health and safety	2	6
Physical environment	2	5
Staffing arrangements	2	4
Relationships with children	2	4
Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	2	6
Governance and leadership	2	6
Total	15	40

Source: ACECQA (2018a).

State and territory government departments take charge of the NQS assessment and ratings process, with trained teams visiting services, including preschools, to observe, discuss and sight documentation to provide evidence of practice that is then rated against 5 levels:

Excellent, Exceeding NQS, Meeting NQS, Working Towards NQS, and Significant Improvement Required.

In view of the variety and diversity within the ECEC sector, the national body, ACECQA, moves the national agenda forward. ACECQA guides the implementation of the NQF for ECEC nationally (ACECQA, 2018a), and is charged with ensuring consistency in delivery, as well as ratifying university programs that educate ECEC teachers. One of ACECQA's many roles is to "improve educational and development outcomes for, and ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of, children attending education and care services" (ACECQA, 2017, p. 8).

ACECQA (2018b) reported on the changes across time, noting that over two-thirds (68%) of ECEC services' reassessments resulted in higher overall ratings, with preschools exhibiting the highest rates of quality improvement. Preschools were also likely to have fewer NQS elements "not met" prior to reassessment, while family day care services and private-for-profit services were more likely to have more elements "not met" prior to reassessment. Through further analysis of the recent reassessment data, QA improvement was highest for QA5 "Relationships with children" (86%), QA4 "Staffing arrangements" and QA6 "Collaborative partnerships with families and communities" (81%). In contrast, services found it more difficult to improve QA1 "Educational program and practice" (70%) and QA7 "Leadership and service management" (72%). These two QAs were found to be the most challenging (ACECQA, 2018b, p. 17).

QA1, *Educational Program and Practice*, includes 3 Standards, each elaborated by 3 elements:

> Standard 1.1, *Program*. The educational program enhances each child's learning and development.
>
> > Element 1.1.1, *Approved learning framework.* Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
> >
> > Element 1.1.2, *Child-centred.* Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.
> >
> > Element 1.1.3, *Program learning opportunities.* All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning. (ACECQA, 2018a, p. 95)

Standard 1.1 and its associated elements (1.1.1, 1.1.2 and 1.1.3) fell within the current practice of ECEC educators of a child-centered program and were mostly met. However, the role of educators in children's learning and development was seen as more challenging:

> Standard 1.2, *Practice*. Educators facilitate and extend each child's learning and development.
>> Element 1.2.1, *Intentional teaching*. Educators are deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful in their decisions and actions.
>> Element 1.2.2, *Responsive teaching and scaffolding*. Educators respond to children's ideas and play and extend children's learning through open-ended questions, interactions and feedback.
>> Element 1.2.3, *Child directed learning*. Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions that influence events and their world. (ACECQA, 2018a, p. 95)

The idea that educators had a specific role to pay in children's learning was more challenging (Standard 1.2). A play-based program had been interpreted as the educator ensuring that the resources were appropriate for the age range of the group and that play areas were kept safe and not too crowded, moving children on to other activities and experiences as the day continued. Any notion of "intentional teaching" was difficult for educators to comprehend. This was a notion they considered far more closely aligned with school teaching than with the role of the ECEC educator. The final standard of this quality area (Standard 1.3) addressed issues with assessment and planning:

> Standard 1.3, *Assessment and planning*. Educators and co-ordinators take a planned and reflective approach to implementing the program for each child.
>> Element 1.3.1, *Assessment and planning cycle*. Each child's learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection.
>> Element 1.3.2, *Critical reflection*. Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation.
>> Element 1.3.3, *Information for families*. Families are informed about the program and their child's progress. (ACECQA, 2018a, p. 95)

While educators were used to observing children's activities throughout the day and keeping records, often illustrated with photographs and examples of the children's paintings, models made, scribbles and the like, they were not used to reflecting on what they observed and using these reflections for planning further activities for each individual child and groups of children (Element 1.3.2).

Torii, Fox, and Cloney (2017) maintained that the evidence is clear that for effective teaching, early childhood educators need to skillfully combine explicit teaching of skills and concepts with sensitive and warm interactions, and this is at the core of quality early education. They have pointed out that unlike in the school sector, supports that build the capability of the early childhood educator workforce have not yet been embedded effectively across the early education system. There is a continuing need to support educators, both in training and in the workforce, in making the links between observation, reflecting on these observations, and planning an appropriate practice for individuals and groups of children.

The E4Kids longitudinal study (Tayler, 2016) of more than 2,400 Australian children prior to school age found the most significant evidence for ECEC program quality, as a driver of child development, was the quality of adult-child engagement measured within daily programs. They identified key educator-child interaction behaviors characterizing high-quality processes and improved child achievement outcomes. In the programs observed within both preschool and LDC settings, most children were provided with high levels of emotional support. However, of concern were the low levels of interactions identified in the areas where educators are to promote young children's thinking, challenge their ideas and understandings, and enrich their language capability. A significant finding from the E4Kids study was the low levels of teaching behaviors across service types that encourage or promote learning during play activities. The E4Kids findings advocate for improvement in the way educators foster children's intellectual and cognitive development.

QA7, now revised to *Governance and leadership*, includes 2 Standards, each elaborated by 3 elements:

Standard 7.1, *Governance*. Governance supports the operation of a quality service.
Element 7.1.1, *Service philosophy and purpose*. A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service's operations.
Element 7.1.2, *Management systems*. Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

Element 7.1.3, *Roles and responsibilities*. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood, and support effective decision-making and operation of the service.

Standard 7.2, *Leadership*. Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.

Element 7.2.1, *Continuous improvement*. There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement process in place.

Element 7.2.2, *Educational leadership*. The educational leader is supported and leads the development and implementation of the educational program and assessment and planning cycle.

Element 7.2.3, *Development of professionals*. Educators, co-ordinators and staff members' performance is regularly evaluated and individual plans are in place to support learning and development. (ACECQA, 2018a, p. 279)

During the years following these major reforms, there was a lack of guidance and minimal reference to how early childhood educators could interpret the QA "Governance and leasdership." Even after a further five years, early childhood education leaders (ECELs) remained somewhat confused concerning their role (Fleet, Soper, Semann, & Madden, 2015; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). Sims, Waniganayake, and Hadley (2018) have pointed out that:

role descriptions are developed locally and there is no state or national consensus of what these might contain. Lines of authority are also unclear and these factors all combine to make it difficult for ECELs to understand and fulfil the expectations held of them. (Sims et al., 2018, p. 964)

In their *Research and Evaluation Strategy and Implementation Plan 2017–21*, ACECQA (2016) identify five objectives of the NQF that they have found to be the most important to focus on in the immediate future (see below from the most challenging to the least):

1. To improve the education and development outcomes for children attending education and care services;

2. To improve efficiency in the regulation of education and care services, including the reduction in regulatory burden;

3. To ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children attending education and care services;

4.   To improve public knowledge and access to information about the quality of education
     and care services;

5.   To promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care
     services.

Access, Equity and Sustainability

The policy landscape in Australian ECEC sector has come a long way in the last couple
of decades, particularly in relation to access and equity. As part of the National Partnership
Agreement on Early Childhood Education (COAG, 2008), Federal and State Governments
committed to the notion that all Australian preschool children would have access to a quality
early childhood program. To this end, the introduction of ACECQA, the NQF and all the
related policies has meant that Australia has shifted from a nation comprising states and
territories pulling in different directions, to a country where there is a national vision for
ECEC. The portfolio nationally (also in some states and territories) has moved from the
Department of Family and Community Services to the Department of Education and
Training. The national vision, as part of the NQF, aims to improve quality through education
and development outcomes for young children, and support families and children who need
it most. Furthermore, one of the main intentions of the NQF is to support children and
families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability, as research has shown that those who
start their education behind can remain behind their peers (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017; Perry
& McConney, 2010; SCRGSP, 2014). The understanding is that "quality" education, early
intervention and support can change the families' trajectories and can interrupt the cycle of
disadvantage (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017).

However, the challenge remains to provide an effective and sustainable ECEC system
that can accommodate all children and families across the whole country fairly and equitably,
regardless of where families live and regardless of their socioeconomic status. The equity
issue of children missing out on quality care and education was identified in the year 2000
(Press & Hayes, 2000) and again in 2006 by Elliott (2006). And, unfortunately, disparate
and fragmented data collection methods with regard to policy effectiveness measures and
indicators remain across jurisdictions making it difficult to gain a comprehensive national
picture (SCRGSP, 2014). In terms of investment in ECEC, Australia is not yet where it
needs to be, according to OECD measures comparing similar countries (OECD, 2017;
Pascoe & Brennan, 2017). In recent years, Australian governments have provided part-time

low-cost or free education to children in the year before school (usually children of four to five years of age), whereas subsidized preschool for three-year-old children has not been available. Recognizing the importance of access to early education for all children, the State of Victoria is introducing a subsidized preschool program for all three-year-olds across the state to be implemented from 2020 (Department of Education and Training, 2019).

Despite government efforts to create a sustainable early childhood system across the country, access and affordability remain as barriers to early education and care. For example, rural and remote families can have difficulty accessing ECEC due to limited places or remoteness, and low-income families can have difficulties affording ECEC (Baxter & Hand, 2013). Further, access and equity in ECEC are critical for children to be able to get the best start to life. Disadvantage experienced by families can include low income, unemployment, low education attainment, geographical barriers such as being located in rural or remote locations, not speaking English, and limited or no access to quality ECEC services. Such issues can affect children's preparedness and readiness for school, which can result in lower educational achievements than their peers in later school years (Perry & McConney, 2010; SCRGSP, 2014). Difficulties accessing ECEC and education, whether this is due to poverty or living in a remote location, can have negative outcomes for children's later educational attainment (Perry & McConney, 2010; SCRGSP, 2014, p. B.17). Whereas, children who participate in quality ECEC are more likely to succeed and make a smooth transition to school, remain in school and "continue on to further education and fully participate in employment and community life as adults" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 11; SCRGSP, 2014).

Looking Ahead

To address some of the issues around access and equity, the report of the Productivity Commission (2013, pp. iii–iv) recommended ways to improve the quality of ECEC. Their recommendations included: ECEC services should be flexible and affordable for diverse families; there should be support for children with disabilities, learning and developmental delays and vulnerable children; support for regional and rural families and, parents who wish to re-enter the workforce or study; and support for the regulation and management of ECEC services. Each of these areas has been government priorities over the past decade, with some noticeable improvements made. More recently, in their *Lifting Our Game* report, Pascoe and Brennan (2017) propose similar recommendations to strengthen ECEC across

the country. They conclude that many of the main foundations required for quality ECEC provision are already in place; however, there is room for improvement in some areas. The areas they focus on are:

- ensuring that there is a long-term investment from governments to improve educational outcomes for all children;
- universal access to include preschool education for three-year-old children;
- strengthening opportunities for early intervention;
- providing access for all children and families;
- investing in and strengthening the ECEC workforce;
- acknowledging the importance of parent and family partnerships;
- continuing to reform the ECEC sector.

Although many of these agendas are in development and are the focus of various governments, some of these agendas (for example, universal access for three-year old children, investing in the ECEC workforce, and providing access for all children and families) have a further way to go to be realized.

In summary, ECEC in Australia has changed significantly since the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education and the launch of the NQF (ACECQA, 2018a; COAG, 2009). The bold reform agenda has gone a long way to create a more accessible, inclusive and equitable ECEC sector, one that strives for quality. For the ECEC sector to continue to improve and strengthen children's learning and development outcomes and aim for continuous improvements in quality, further government investment is required.

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澳洲幼兒教育和關懷服務之發展

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摘 要

　　澳洲幅員廣大，以總面積計是大洋洲中最大和世界第六大國家。澳洲聯邦有 6 個州和兩個領地，人口超過 2,500 萬，主要集中在東南海岸線和各州、領地的首府。澳洲幼兒教育和關懷服務的發展幾經轉變，自數十年前由家庭各自安排，到近期由聯邦政府擴大和增加服務，以提升兒童學習和發展的成效和質素。本文參考現有政府檔案，了解澳洲如何開展非正規的幼兒教育和關懷服務，以至於近期服務經過改革，制定出國家質素架構以引領服務發展，目的是提升教育成效，從而改善就業和社會狀況。要達致全面而暢順的質素保證，尚有不少障礙。本文會討論當前澳洲在這方面的挑戰，並提供應對建議。

關鍵詞：幼兒教育和關懷服務；澳洲；政策發展；國家質素架構；機會與公平

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