



The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Early Childhood Education vision document and to support the National Cabinet's goal to develop a long-term vision for Early Childhood Education and Care. The vision is an important initiative that draws together the work of education, wellbeing and community services to support ECEC in Australia.

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is the peak body representing State and Territory associations of educators dedicated to furthering the learning of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Association members include EAL/D teachers, consultants, curriculum developers, teacher educators, other academics and researchers in school and preschool, tertiary, adult migrant, vocational education and training (VET) and community education settings. ACTA is committed to strengthening ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledges the role of early childhood education in recognising and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in advancing reconciliation. The attached *ECE Principles* document presents ACTA's proposals for improving home language development and EAL/D provision in the Australian early childhood sector catering for children from birth to five years of age .

ECEC programs for children are located in urban, regional, rural and remote communities across Australia. Different cohorts from linguistically and culturally diverse communities participate in ECE, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrant and refugee groups, and communities from varying socio-economic backgrounds. EAL/D learners thus bring with them a variety of cultures, language backgrounds, experiences, and levels of EAL/D proficiency.

Inclusive and strengths-based practice enables ECEC settings to reflect and nurture children's diversity. It is about every child accessing, participating meaningfully in, and experiencing positive outcomes from ECEC programs. Inclusion is important as it nurtures diversity and enhances children's experiences in quality ECEC. Diversity underlines the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) Principle 3: Pedagogy that respects diversity and is flexible, responsive to language learning needs' (AGDE, 2022, p. 21).

Language tends to be subsumed under the broader term culture and ACTA argues that language needs to be made more visible. While cultures include knowledges, beliefs and practices, languages are fundamental for communication between generations and both within and across diverse communities. A common language can connect children, families and communities with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. ACTA contends that language needs explicit mention in the ECE vision document in order to acknowledge the significance of home languages alongside English for children's learning and developing sense of identity and belonging.

ACTA members believe that Australia can harness our shared linguistic diversity and help all children learn and use home and community languages, while at the same time adding their English communication skills.

## ACTA provides the following suggestions for rewording the draft vision document.

### Principles

#### **Quality:**

ECEC services are **culturally appropriate** for their community and meet high standards in providing learning and development outcomes.

*Suggested rewording:* **culturally and linguistically inclusive**

#### **Accessibility**

Geographic or **cultural barriers** to attending a high-quality ECEC are removed

*Suggested rewording:* **Geographic, cultural and linguistic barriers**

### Vision

Every child can access and participate in high-quality, **culturally responsive ECEC**, including preschool, to support their right to thrive, grow their sense of identity and connection to the world, and become confident and engaged learners.

*Suggested rewording:* **culturally and linguistically responsive ECEC**

**Every parent** can access an affordable, high-quality service to support their participation in the workforce, and the associated social and economic benefits.

*Suggested rewording:* **Every parent/carer**

### Outcomes

Services respond to community, cultural and family contexts and **can provide continuity of learning and care to children.**

*Suggested rewording:* **cultural, language and family contexts and can provide continuity of learning, language maintenance and care to children.**

**First nations children are empowered to embrace their identity and culture**

*Suggested rewording:* **empowered to embrace their identity, culture and languages**

First Nations families feel supported to consistently access quality, **culturally inclusive ECEC.**

*Suggested rewording:* **culturally and linguistically inclusive ECEC.**

ECEC services respect and nourish **First Nations culture and kinship.** We grow our **First Nations and Aboriginal** community-controlled workforce, recognising the importance of children seeing themselves, their identities, and **cultures** reflected in their environment.

*Suggested rewording:* ECEC services respect and nourish **First Nations cultures, languages and kinship.** We grow our **First Nations (delete term 'and Aboriginal')** community-controlled

workforce, recognising the importance of children seeing themselves, their identities, cultures and languages reflected in their environment.

New workers are inspired and supported to train and work in the ECEC sector

*Suggested rewording:* ... work in the ECEC sector in ways that build on their linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge.

Enablers

**Workforce:** Attracting, training and retaining a high quality workforce is a critical factor in achieving the vision.

*Suggested rewording:* **Workforce:** Attracting, training and retaining a high quality workforce with diverse cultural and language expertise is a critical factor in achieving the vision

**Data and evidence:** Policies, models and interventions must be underpinned by comprehensive high quality data and evidence.

*Suggested rewording:* **Data and evidence:** Policies, models and interventions must be underpinned by comprehensive high quality data and evidence, and sensitive to the need to grow new data sets in this developing field.