

**Associate Professor Marg Rogers (she/her) PhD**

Early Childhood Education

Course Coordinator - Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching)

Postdoctoral Fellow - **Manna Institute**

School of Education, Faculty of HASSE

**University of New England**, Armidale NSW 2351 Australia

Australia's ECEC system is an essential part of Australian society and the Australian economy. The system facilitates benefits for children and families by providing education and care, while also benefiting overall productivity by enabling parents and carers to increase participation in work and study. Furthermore, educators support parents by [providing child development information](#) and engaging in advocacy and referrals to essential health, social, and community supports. [Without these supports](#), communities can struggle to attract and retain other essential workers. Almost all regional, rural and remote communities, and low SES metropolitan suburbs are in '[childcare deserts](#)' which means three or more families are competing for the one space.

The comprehensive ECEC system comprises of dedicated pre-school programs, CBDC, Family Day Care (FDC), Outside of School Hours Care (OSHC), Vacation Care Services (VAC), and In Home Care (IHC)

services. Approximately 1.5 million children participate in ECEC programs each week.

Multiple, COMPLEX and varied layers of governance and regulatory frameworks shape the ECEC sector.

The ECEC sector operates under the National Quality Framework (NQF), managed by the

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The NQF

comprises the National Quality Standard (NQS) and *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) provides.

Services are rated against the NQS as: Working Towards NQS, Meeting NQS, Excellent, or Exceeding NQS.

The reduction in early childhood ITE completions and ECT workforce

concentration in school settings is significant in the face of workforce challenges and growing demand. Recent rapid expansion across the sector, including an increase in the number of preschool hours that children are entitled to, shapes a need for additional early childhood teachers. Australia now needs more than [21,000 more educators](#), and stem the high attrition rates.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) Australian Teacher Workforce Data finds that since 2018, the number of students completing early childhood ITE has decreased by an average of 4.9% each year. While the range of early childhood teacher ITE program offerings provides choice for students, those who train across ages often choose to work in primary school settings rather than ECEC. In 2022, 44% of the ECT workforce were employed in a school setting rather than solely ECEC.

This preference of workplace setting further illuminates the challenges in retaining staff in the ECEC sector. Into this mix, the rise in the number of [accelerated graduate diploma programs](#) has raised concerns about the quality of the graduates and their motivations for entering the sector. These courses have sometimes been linked to obtaining Australian visas and [safety risks for children](#). The reduction in early childhood ITE completions and ECT workforce

concentration in school settings is significant in the face of workforce challenges and growing demand. Recent rapid expansion across the sector, including an increase in the number of preschool hours that children are entitled to, shapes a need for additional early childhood teachers. In 2025, a major Australian Broadcasting Commission [Four Corners investigation](#) revealed an alarming number of safety breaches and child sexual abuse in the sector. This has involved perpetrators circumventing the system by working in different states to avoid prosecution. State and Territory Governments are now cooperating with the federal Government to ensure there is a federal system. Additionally, this has led parents to lose faith in the sector, as providers with multiple ongoing breaches are allowed to open new services, and state and territory governments are failing to act in a timely manner. There have been concerns that the for-profit model is failing because children's care and education are being neglected to save money, despite the high cost to taxpayers. Additionally, educators have been [asked not to report](#) breaches to avoid the service losing their accreditation. While the number of male educators has been increasing in the sector, parental fears have led some services to no longer employ males, and other males to leave the sector, as they are [feeling blamed](#).