

Education

1. Education is a human right and a public good. Pivotal to the achievement of social inclusion and cohesion is an education policy which aims to ameliorate social divides.
2. Public education, free, secular and universally accessible, is recognised as the foundation for a socially cohesive and prosperous Australia. The greatest benefit of public education is realised in the local, socially representative public school.
3. Congress believes that public investment in early childhood education, schools, TAFE colleges and universities is not only an investment in education it is also a capital investment with significant economic and social benefits to society.
4. Congress calls upon the Government to adopt policies that promote lifelong learning and effective transitions between Australia's early childhood education institutions, schools, TAFE colleges and universities, as well as between education and work and non-work roles including familial and caring activities.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Giving Children the Best Start in Life

5. All children should be given the best possible start in life. Every child deserves to grow up to be all that they can be, no matter what their parents earn. This can be achieved through equitable access to quality early education delivered by qualified teachers and educators who are appropriately remunerated in accordance with the value of the work they undertake. Universal quality early learning is the key to ensuring every child has the best start in life. For the full benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC) to be realized, children should be at the centre of all policy initiatives.
6. Universal access to high quality maternal and child health and early childhood education is the starting point of equal opportunity for all Australians. Valuing ECEC as an integral part of the education system recognizes the immense contribution of early education in the life of a child. Policy initiatives should prioritise ECEC programs to maximise participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged children, for example those living in rural or remote communities, children from low socio-economic backgrounds and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
7. Congress notes that valuing children means valuing those that work with them in ECEC settings. Children's access to the high-quality education and care they need is threatened by a worsening workforce shortage. Vacancies for ECEC jobs are at record highs and are substantially above those of the wider workforce.
8. This shortage is exacerbated by continuing failures to properly value and support the work of early childhood teachers and educators. Modern, high quality ECEC is a complex field that requires teachers and educators to have undertaken qualifications and possess significant professional skill and knowledge to assist children to develop emotionally, cognitively and socially. Valuing all workers in the ECEC sector means according them the professional pay and conditions they deserve for the challenging work they perform. Teachers and educators voices and experience should also be at the centre of decisions about the sector and their work. A qualified, supported and professionally paid workforce is key to a world-class ECEC system and Australian children deserve nothing less.
9. Access to high quality early childhood education and care is under threat by a worsening workforce shortage. The ECEC sector's workforce demands include requiring an additional 16,000 education support personnel and 8,000 teachers by November 2025. Attraction, supply and retention of educators and teachers must be a priority for governments. In responding to this increased demand in the sector, the quality of the workforce must be upheld.

Supporting Workforce Participation of Parents

10. Along with lifelong improved developmental outcomes for children, access to free, high quality, ECEC delivered by qualified and skilled early childhood teachers and educators not only ensures the best outcomes for children, it is central to enabling the workforce participation of parents.
11. Congress notes that Australia's employment rate for mothers is now at 75%, compared to the OECD average of 71%. Free and high quality ECEC with an adequate number of hours per week contribute to an increase in the participation of women in the labour force. The OECD notes the relationship between a mother's labour market participation and enrolment rates in formal ECEC is strong. Congress notes that women's lack of access to childcare is a key issue preventing participation in the workforce.
12. Equally, parents must also have access to workplace rights that provide secure and predictable working patterns that match the availability of care. Barriers in the workplace to suitable working patterns and arrangements severely impact on the participation of carer's, and in particular women, in the labour force and also lead to poor participation in ECEC, particularly for children in low-income households.
13. Delivering universal access to quality play base early learning achieves the dual objective of supporting children's equal development and the workforce participation of parents.
14. Congress calls on Government to:
 - a. Guarantee universal access to high-quality publicly provided ECEC for all children aged 0-5 years for at least 30 hours a week; and
 - b. provide an industrial relations system that provides secure and predictable working patterns that enable working parents equal access to formal ECEC, particularly for those who work in industries with non- standard hours.
 - c. Remove the activity test for access to subsidised early childhood education.

Ensuring Quality Early Childhood Education and Care

15. Unions have a role in being vigilant about the promotion of quality standards and parental awareness of changes to the system, given access to quality care and education for children is critical to many workers' continued employment and the health and wellbeing of their families and community.
16. Congress notes the complex regulatory frameworks that govern the ECEC sector. The implementation and monitoring of the regulatory framework must be appropriately funded by government and resourced to ensure that the requirements can be met and the relevant industrial conditions are recognised in the awards. All governments, children and families benefit from the jointly governed National Quality Framework. In partnership with the states and territories, the Federal Government must maintain a responsibility for preschool education, including significant contribution to funding. To ensure high quality ECEC, congress calls on the Federal Government to provide adequate funding to guarantee:
 - a. provision of appropriate learning and teaching conditions such as group sizes, staff-children ratios and other agreed national standards;
 - b. purpose built facilities for the achievement of an optimum learning environment and to meet the standards of Workplace Occupational Health and Safety regulations;
 - c. indexation of funding to cover the salaries and professional development of workers and to meet the requirements of supporting children with additional needs.

Workforce Crisis

17. Congress recognises the highly feminised nature of the ECEC workforce and the systemic undervaluation of ECEC work as evident by a gender wage gap of approximately twice the national average. In feminized occupations, women's average weekly wages were found to be 74% those of men, compared to 84% in male dominated industries. Congress recognises the role of the overlapping and interlocking markers of feminisation in the sector in forming barriers to genuine enterprise bargaining. These include: a mostly female workforce; a decentralised industry; a lack of targeted

government funding or industry strategy; increasing casualization; the vocational nature of the work; high turnover; and an historical lack of community understanding of the content and value of early childhood education work.

18. Low wages in the ECEC sector have contributed to a workforce crisis. Congress notes that over the past decade, staff turnover has been extremely high as experienced and dedicated early childhood education and care professionals have been forced to leave to look for better paid and properly recognised roles elsewhere.
19. Workforce shortages have also seen a rise in the number of services relying on staffing waivers under the National Quality Standards. There has been a marked increase in the proportion of services with a staffing waiver over the last ten years, with the proportion of ECEC services using staffing waivers tripling from 3.2% in 2013 to 10% in 2023. The national proportion of long day care services with a staffing waiver is 17.4%, compared to 2.8% of preschools/kindergartens. Congress recognizes that the quality of early learning children experience is negatively impacted by high turnover and workforce shortages. Safety and quality outcomes for children is directly linked to the qualifications and experience of staff as well as the ability of staff to form secure and consistent relationships with children, Research shows that teachers and educators are leaving the sector because of low pay, poor conditions and the lack of professional recognition. High turnover is also increasing recruitment and training costs of services.
20. To ensure early childhood teachers and educators are properly valued for the important work they do, and to ensure they are attracted to and stay in this essential education sector, wages in the sector must reflect the value of their work. Congress calls on Government to recognise the endemic low pay that characterises the gender-segregated industry of ECEC and assume responsibility for addressing this inequity.
21. Congress notes that it is not possible for parents and providers to provide resources sufficient to achieve appropriate and comparable levels of remuneration without government funded support. Additionally, Congress notes that children's equity of access to early learning is impacted by high fees. Given that the majority of funding to the sector originates with the Federal Government, Congress believes that Government must acknowledge its responsibility for ensuring that the sector is funded adequately to allow early childhood educators and teachers be paid wages commensurate with their skills and qualifications.
22. Congress calls on government to work together with unions and employers to ensure that early childhood education and care teachers and educators receive appropriate and comparable levels of pay. Congress calls on the Federal Government to commit to the provision of funding appropriate and comparable levels of pay for early childhood teachers and educators in recognition of the important and skilled work they.
23. Congress calls on the Federal Government to commit at the bargaining table to fund a much needed wage rise of 25% or higher for all educators. To ensure the money goes directly to educators, funding must be tied to a negotiated and enforceable industrial instrument.
24. Congress calls on Government to fund a new national ECEC workforce strategy to ensure and guarantee the ongoing professionalism of the ECEC workforce, improve service quality and get the best outcomes for children. Improving qualifications, training and working conditions is an essential quality ECEC policy lever. Quality ECEC is absolutely dependent on quality educators and teachers. A national ECEC workforce strategy needs to support – not replace – achieving professional pay. A national ECEC workforce strategy should at a minimum include policy levers around:
 - a. ensuring a high-quality vocational education and training (VET) sector with greater oversight of registered training organisations' ECEC programs to ensure that they are producing educators with the requisite skills;
 - b. establishing paid professional development and meaningful career pathways;
 - c. investigating and addressing the impact of remuneration and conditions on workforce recruitment, stability, retention and quality;
 - d. setting minimum benchmarks on the percentage of revenue services should allocate to workforce costs to support high quality;

- e. providing resources including funded programming to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to ensure culturally appropriate ECEC services are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children; and lastly
- f. appropriate ECEC workforce data collection to drive the world's best practice in early education.

Supporting Quality through the National Quality Framework

25. Congress notes general support for the National Quality Framework (NQF) including the Early Years Learning Framework, National Quality Standards, Quality Rating System and Quality Improvement Plan. Congress calls on the Federal Government to commit to long term funding for ACECQA and the National Partnership on the National Quality Agenda in order to maintain the consistent application of the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations. All governments, children and families benefit from the jointly governed National Quality Framework.
26. Congress acknowledges workforce shortages and cost pressures create challenges in implementing and building on the NQF. However, addressing these pressures requires government to address funding arrangements and the workforce crisis, not altering the standards. Watering down standards, especially those related to ratios and qualifications requirements, will result in reduced quality for children and results in poorer conditions for teachers and educators.
27. The National Quality Framework (NQF) contains a number of specific requirements regarding the level of skills and qualifications of the ECEC workforce. Congress supports these requirements, as they reflect the professional standing and role of early childhood education and care professionals.
28. Congress believes it is the responsibility of governments to ensure there are sufficient funds and appropriate working conditions to facilitate the realistic implementation of the NQF, including:
 - a. access to genuinely fee-free courses;
 - b. recognised prior learning programs;
 - c. access to paid study leave;
 - d. access to adequate/sufficient paid non contact time for planning and evaluating educational programs and documenting children's learning and development;
 - e. addressing workforce shortages to ensure services meet minimum staff ratio and qualification requirements; and
 - f. ensuring safe staffing and access to breaks are addressed through appropriate regulatory arrangements and/or industrial agreements negotiated with unions.
29. Congress urges the Government to ensure that, commensurate with the National Quality Framework, funding is allocated to ensure that classification structures, wages and conditions properly value these higher qualifications.
30. Congress advocates for skills and training policies explicitly directed towards enabling early childhood teachers and educators to develop a career path in this important educator sector.
31. It is essential that any current or future 'fee-free' programs are genuinely free of fees. In low paid industries such as ECEC, hidden fees in the form of amenity or course fees can provide a major disincentive to further study. Congress calls on the Federal Government to monitor TAFE and other training organisations fee structures to ensure the provision of genuinely fee-free places.

Investment to Ensure Access and Quality – An Investment in our Children's Future

32. Congress notes that Australia is substantially behind other developed countries behind when it comes to public investment in ECE. Australia's expenditure on pre-primary education is 0.6% of GDP, less than the OECD average of 0.8% of GDP for 3-5 year olds. Australia's preschool expenditure per child aged 3-5 years is \$7,399 US, 20% less than the OECD average of \$9,260 US and 23% less than the EU average of \$9,564 US per child.

33. Congress acknowledges the federal budget 2023-24 ongoing funding commitment for the Universal Access to Preschool National Partnership for all four year olds and recognises the campaigning from the ECEC sector to achieve this vital program. However, Congress recognises that public investment still continues to fall short of levels needed to ensure free and high quality education and care for Australia's next generation. Affordability of early childhood education and care both impacts children's ability to access the learning they need and workforce participations of parents. Government policies must ensure that funding arrangements are appropriate for supporting affordable high quality ECEC for all families, especially for those children who stand to benefit the most, for example, low income, disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
34. Further, government policies must ensure that participation in early childhood education and care is not impacted by increasing costs. In particular, capacity to pay must not be a barrier to access to early childhood education programs. Congress notes that the ACCC has recently found that changes to Child Care Subsidies have reduced out of pocket costs for families accessing ECEC by 11% on average, but also notes that the ACCC Inquiry found that "childcare fees across all services have grown faster than inflation and wages since the introduction of the subsidy" and that the affordability benefits of these changes are likely to be eroded over time due to fee increases.
35. Any policies that seek to reduce out of pocket costs to families by compromising quality standards are unacceptable. Best practice quality education and care must be actively encouraged and rewarded, and Government should continue its commitment to improving quality standards in the sector not only through greater monitoring and assessment of services but also by ensuring that funding arrangements are appropriate to support these objectives.
36. The current funding arrangements are both insufficient and inefficient and are not adequately targeted at delivering resources to ECEC professionals or children in early education and care. Government is currently paying a large share of ECEC costs in subsidies to parents, however, the actual price of fees is determined by ECEC providers. A complex market with majority small for-profit operators results in funding inefficiencies including taxpayer money directed away from education and care towards private profit and corporate rents. Congress continues to advocate for direct service based funding which is tied to appropriate wages for staff and support for training and development and quality outcomes for children and families.
37. Congress reasserts the need for government regulation requiring ECEC providers to provide greater transparency of financial practices to ensure resources are used appropriately to benefit children, employees and parents. Ongoing financial regulations are required to monitor the status of operators, ensuring that sound accounting practices are in place, including transparency around internal allocation of resources, ownership of fixed assets and disclosure of private equity interests.
38. Congress urges Government to work to maintain a diversity of services available to parents, in particular the ongoing supply of ECEC delivered through Government agencies or the not-for profit sector. Since 1991 the for-profit market share in long day care has increased from 48% to over 68%. Private for-profits represent the highest proportion of services not meeting all of the National Quality Standards. In addition to the deleterious effect of private markets on the pay and conditions of the ECEC workforce, regarding compliance with the ECEC National Quality Standards for-profit ECEC services tend to underperform in comparison to public and not-for-profit services. Only 13% of private for-profit providers are rated as "Exceeding" the National Quality Standards, compared to 37% of community managed not-for-profit services and 48% of state/territory and local government managed services. For profit services also have higher rates of educator turn over than the community / not-for-profit sector, with only one third of teachers or educators with greater than three years of service in a for-profit centre compared to two thirds of teachers or educators in the not for profit sector. For profit services also reduce their labour costs by hiring less experienced teachers and paying close to- or award- rates, impacting the quality of education and care being delivered. The continued shifting of Local Government provided ECEC into the private sector reduces the sector's diversity and capacity.
39. Congress notes that the Inquiry into Price Gouging and Unfair Pricing Practices found weak price competition in the ECEC sector, with private providers consistently having higher margins than not for profit providers, and consistently paying lower wages and hiring less experienced teachers. The Inquiry identified a high risk of price gouging from the larger for-profit centres, who have the ability to translate childcare subsidies into higher fees because of their insulation from competition.

40. Congress calls on state and Federal governments in all jurisdictions to expand publicly provided ECEC. As noted above, the majority of long day care services in Australia are run by private for-profit providers, which is detrimental for quality and access. Government should be the principal provider of long day care in Australia, and should invest in and develop publicly run, fit-for-purpose long day care centres that directly employ educators.
41. Commonwealth and state and territory governments should fund the integration or colocation of early childhood education services which are school based and/or other public or community/not for profit services through the provision of capital funding for facilities and infrastructure and qualification upgrades for early education centres.

Programs to Support Children with Additional Needs

42. Congress asserts that the lack of adequate funding, resources and supports for early childhood education and care for children with additional needs, such as geographic location, socio-economic circumstances, workplace rights that provide secure and predictable working patterns, cultural diversity or disability, are a significant barrier to equity and access.
43. Congress urges government to provide an immediate and significant increase in funding to ensure children with additional needs are provided with equitable access to high quality, properly resourced early childhood education which meets the needs of every child to participate.
44. The right to inclusive education has been a core part of work of the Disability Royal Commission. The commission made 15 recommendations that provide deep insights into what can be done to improve outcomes for students with disability to enable them to access and participate in education on an equal basis to their peers. Congress urges government to adequately fund programs that provide high quality inclusive education that supports children with disability.
45. Federal, State and Territory governments must work in partnership to ensure that programs, resources and funding address the needs of children with additional needs.

Programs to Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

46. Congress believes that early childhood education and care must recognise and affirm the cultural knowledge, language and values of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
47. Congress calls on government to give priority access to two years of high quality, culturally appropriate, free early learning education to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
48. Congress believes that all providers of ECEC 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 and Torres Strait Islander children is a focus on identity and self-determination and belonging and that the delivery of care and education must be culturally inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies.
49. Congress urges government to ensure that providers of ECEC services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:
 - a. Provide professional development opportunities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and training to counter racism for all staff;
 - b. Adopt teaching practices which recognise, value and utilise the student's first languages and Aboriginal English/Kriol and Torres Strait Islander Kriol;
 - c. Provide environments in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents feel welcome and encouraged to be involved in the education program;
 - d. Increase employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Early Childhood Education settings; and
 - e. Adopt practices which maximise the co-ordination of early childhood education and care programs with wrap-around services, such as health services and nutrition education programs.

50. Congress also urges government to ensure that 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.

Access to ECEC for Families working Non-Standard Hours

51. Congress advocates the following principles to ensure accessible and free early childhood education and care is provided to all families, including those who work non-standard hours:
- Access to ECEC has the best interests of the development of children and quality of learning and care as the primary objective;
 - Parents working non-standard hours and those in irregular employment have equal access to ECEC options which are in the best interest of their children;
 - Financial assistance is appropriately targeted to those parents who need it and supports parents to participate in the paid labour market;
 - Government funded assistance to parents who work non-standard hours or are in irregular employment should not be a substitute for access to quality ECEC for all children;
 - Congress recommends that ECEC services should be co-ordinated in a manner which improves access for parents who work non-standard hours or are in irregular employment; and
 - Congress calls on the government to pilot co-location of different ECEC services such as long day care and occasional care with maternal and child health services, preschools, playgroups, early interventions professionals and specialists and other related services in regional 'hubs' that enable families to utilise a range of ECEC services in a complementary manner.

Services developed to cater for children outside of standard hours will be appropriately regulated to ensure the safety, care and developmental needs of children are met.

Out of School Hours and Vacation Care

52. Congress is aware that many parents do not have access to quality out of school hours care (OSHC), including vacation care. In particular, many OSHC programmes are not extended to young children attending secondary schools. Congress believes that as a minimum, all school children up until fourteen years of age should have access to quality, affordable and age appropriate OSCH programs and vacation care.

Schools

School Funding

53. Governments have a prime obligation to adequately and appropriately fund government schools in order to provide high quality public schooling that is accessible to all children and young people in every community. in every community. Every public school should be fully funded at a minimum of 100% of its Schooling Resource Standard as a matter of urgency. Non-government schools should also be supported by needs-based funding and receive 100% of their SRS entitlement.
54. Congress asserts that only needs-based funding will provide a fair and equitable system that will deliver results and close the achievement gaps between students of different backgrounds.
55. There must be increased public investment in education and distribution of public funds to ensure that:
- the total level of resources available for schooling ensures that a high-quality education is accessible for all students;
 - public funding across different schools and sectors is distributed fairly and equitably, ensuring that 100% of the SRS is delivered to public schools through a consistent approach to assessing the needs of all students.

- c. the total level of funding for public schooling is at a minimum 100% of the SRS, and is adequate to ensure access to high quality public schooling for all, and all governments' funding policies recognise this as a national priority.
56. Congress notes that in 2017, the Federal Government amended the Australian Education ACT 2013 and changed the way that funding is delivered by capping the Commonwealth's contribution to public school funding at 20% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This amended legislation and the subsequent bilateral agreements signed between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, now extended to the end of 2024, leaves at least 98% of public schools below the SRS indefinitely, denying much needed resources and entrenching funding inequality.
 57. Congress notes that the bilateral funding agreements signed in 2018 allow states and the Northern Territory to divert 4% of their SRS funding contribution away from public schools in the form of an "additional allowance" to write off depreciation, regulatory costs and in some jurisdictions transport costs, Congress notes that prior to the 2022 Federal Election the ALP described the "additional allowance as an "accounting trick" and promised to remove it from future agreements.
 58. Congress notes that the "additional allowance" write off of 4% of SRS denies public schools \$2.1 billion a year of their allocated recurrent funding.
 59. Congress also notes that negotiations for the next round of bilateral funding agreements are underway between Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments.
 60. Congress calls upon the Government to:
 - a. Remove the legislated 20% cap on the Commonwealth share of the Schooling Resource Standard for public schools and increase Commonwealth contributions to at least 25% of SRS.
 - b. Ensure that all schools are operating at a minimum of 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) which is recognised as the minimum funding requirement to give every child, regardless of their background, the greatest opportunity to achieve their full potential; including fully funded loadings for students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students, students from low-SES backgrounds, rural and remote students, and students requiring English language support;
 - c. Remove the 4% "additional allowance" that applies only to public schools from school funding bilateral agreements and allows jurisdictions to write off \$2.1 billion of their SRS contributions every year.
 - d. Make a significant initial investment to modernise public school buildings and establish a permanent capital fund for public schools to help meet rising enrolments, undertake important upgrades and to develop modern learning environments.
 61. Congress calls on governments to ensure the process for developing new funding agreements is transparent and involves meaningful consultation with all stakeholders, including education unions.

Quality Teaching

62. Congress calls upon the federal and state and territory governments to improve the status and value of the teaching profession by:
 - a. Addressing workforce supply and demand by ensuring the adequate supply of fully qualified teachers and skilled education support staff for every school in Australia.
 - b. Recruiting the top 30 per cent of students into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from other points/pathways.
 - c. Protecting the quality of teaching and learning by the rejection of "fast-tracked" teacher education programs such as Teach for Australia or similar.
 - d. Investing in appropriate salary, employment conditions and job security.
 - e. Removing the salary caps imposed by state and territory governments.

- f. Increasing support and mentoring opportunities for early career teachers to reduce the number of new teachers leaving the profession.
 - g. Building trust in and respect for the professional autonomy of the teaching workforce.
 - h. Ensuring that all teachers have access to ongoing, funded quality professional development opportunities, with a priority given to professional development on the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
 - i. Addressing escalating workloads through enhancing respect for the value of teachers work.
 - j. Addressing gender inequity in the workforce, including the gender pay gap, better career pathways, wages and conditions for women in the education workforce.
63. Congress calls on governments to ensure that all education workplaces are safe, inclusive and representative with a diverse workforce reflective of our communities. This includes the provision of:
- a. family and domestic violence paid leave for those impacted by this type of violence;
 - b. accessible workplaces and practices;
 - c. flexible work policies and practices that encourage teachers with caring responsibilities to remain in the profession;
 - d. Cultural and ceremonial leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees;
 - e. programs and practices to counter all types of discrimination with a priority focus on the elimination of racism in all education settings;
 - f. gender neutral language in policy and industrial instruments; and
 - g. programs and practices to counter occupational violence, including the establishment of trained Anti-Racism Contact Officer positions in all education settings.

Quality Jobs for All School Staff

64. Congress calls upon the federal and state and territory governments to improve the status and value of all roles within schools by recognising the contribution of all staff, including specialist and non teaching staff, to student outcomes and their role in reducing teacher workload thus contributing to better attraction and retention of teaching staff by:
- a. Ensuring non-teaching staff such as education support personnel, grounds and maintenance and cleaning staff have paid time in which to undertake development, consultation and other tasks associated with their employment.
 - b. Ensuring that non-teaching staff have direct secure employment, adequate hours and ongoing training and development.

Union Education

65. The important role of the Union movement has played in Australian history has largely been removed from secondary education curricula around Australia. Today many young people enter the workforce with no knowledge of what a Union is and what Unions have achieved for Australian workers. The removal of Unions from Australia's history is something we must address to ensure that Unions continue to be recognized for the important role they play in Australian society. Congress will lobby Commonwealth, state and territory governments to ensure that the role of Unions in Australian history is once more taught to all secondary students across Australia.
66. Congress also calls on the Commonwealth Government to reinstate the commitment to the establishment in the Nation's capital of the Australian Labour History Museum in the Capital's museums precinct, and to provide permanent preservation of our history and also provide ongoing funding for education for visiting school groups on their workplace rights and where they came from, as well as travelling exhibitions and education from this base.

Vocational education and training

Union Principles for VET

67. Congress reaffirms its support for the operation of a high quality, well resourced, nationally consistent, equitable and affordable vocational education and training system with public TAFE and union-endorsed not-for-profit industry specific training institutions at its centre. The skills and capabilities, nationally portable and/or transferable qualifications and broad education that TAFEs and the vocational education and training system deliver are vital for workers facing a changing workplace.
68. The Australian economy is undergoing significant transformation. From the scale of the energy transition, to the growth in automation and digitization, there are both unprecedented opportunities and risks for workers. In the midst of this change, workers are and should be entitled to be skilled for jobs that meet the future skill needs of industry and the nation and to participate in a fair and equitable society that provides opportunities to all. Australia's pathway to becoming a high productivity nation is through improving our workforce capabilities. VET is a critical element of any plan to achieve this end.
69. The TAFE and vocational education and training system allows students and workers to get the critical skills and capabilities they need to enter the workforce, move into higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs, return to the workforce, or transition to a new field of work. VET will play an increasingly central role in facilitating transitioning workers as economic shifts such as climate change and digitization continue to impact on the lives and jobs of working people, as well as meeting growing demand in industries like the care and support economy and in trades that are critical to the decarbonisation transition like electricians and electrotechnology.
70. Union-endorsed, not-for-profit RTOs are uniquely placed to develop and invest in the specialized training required in emerging industries. Collaboration between unions and industry in the delivery of training results in higher completion rates, and training packages that are responsive to the needs of changing industries.
71. The TAFE and vocational education and training system's primary purpose is to provide a strong vocational education, focused on training workers in 'skills for jobs' and occupational outcomes based on standards determined by industry (including unions). At the same time, it is critical that the TAFE and vocational education and training system provides general and further education, including foundation skills and 'second chance' learning. This type of education empowers people to participate more fully in Australian society, particularly the vulnerable, marginalised, disadvantaged and those individuals with different abilities.
72. The TAFE and vocational education and training system should also offer the opportunity for students to transfer to and from the university education sector, without the system losing its focus on the development of vocational skills and capabilities and labour market outcomes.
73. Workers in the VET sector should have access to secure, qualified and well-paid jobs with good conditions as a cornerstone of building a vibrant VET sector. Casualisation and insecure work remains a significant issue in the VET workforce and this must change.
74. The TAFE and the vocational education and training system is fundamental to achieving gender equity. To do so, it must provide genuine opportunities for all women to learn through accessible, flexible, inclusive and safe education and training programs.
75. The TAFE and vocational education and training system must build accessible pathways to higher qualifications, particularly in women-dominated occupations, so that workers can be recognised for specialist skills to support career progression and be compensated through progressive classification structures.
76. The TAFE and vocational education and training system is fundamental to increasing the recognition of historically "invisible skills" in women-dominated occupations. It should provide graduated learning structures to support career progression and recognise specialist knowledge in work historically and incorrectly portrayed as "low skill".
77. The key, enduring characteristics and strengths of the TAFE and vocational education and training system that unions will, where appropriate, continue to promote and defend include:

- a. A dynamic and well-resourced TAFE system as the public provider of quality vocational education and training across the country, especially in regional areas;
- b. A system focused on delivering quality vocational education and training, which meets industry and community needs through delivery by TAFEs and union-endorsed not-for-profit RTOs that provide industry specific training, rather than profits to private providers. Government should aim at the targeted expansion of TAFE and union-endorsed not-for-profit RTOs to address current shortages of training places in growing sectors and regions;
- c. A national system based on nationally recognised, regulated and portable qualifications that give workers the transferable skills to work across an industry or occupation or to move interstate, while delivering critical competence for community safety and emergency response, rather than simply narrow enterprise- specific skill sets;
- d. The industry leadership of the vocational education and training system by unions (including teacher unions and unions representing workers who utilise the VET system) and employers, including through tripartite bodies such as the Jobs and Skills Councils;
- e. The primacy of national training products developed and endorsed by industry as the vocational standards required for safe and effective performance in the workplace, supported by such foundation education necessary to empower people to participate fully in Australian society;
- f. Vocational education and training and skills development as an integral part of workplace bargaining, with qualifications linked to job roles and award classification structures; and
- g. An apprenticeship and traineeship system that combines work with vocational education on and off-the job under nationally consistent Training Contract arrangements that support the rights of apprentices and trainees.

Issues in the VET System

78. **The marketisation of VET has failed to deliver on its promises.** The decision to leave the provision of quality VET to the market has resulted in a system where many students do not receive the training they are paying for and where graduates are often not sufficiently skilled.
79. **The future of TAFE.** Due to steady declines in funding, and the loss of students to private providers under the former coalition government, Many TAFE campuses were closed and much TAFE infrastructure was degraded, Under recent government policy changes the reputation and future of TAFE has been elevated but more needs to be done to assure TAFE's future. This includes access to a skilled and experienced VET workforce.
80. **A national shortage of skilled and experienced trainers and assessors.** In many industries, the shift from industry into teaching comes with a severe salary cut and little support. Wage supplements and better integrated pathways between industry and the training sector would better integrate trainers into the workforce, ensuring that trainers maintain up-to-date knowledge of industry needs.
81. **Employer investment in vocational education & training is grossly inadequate and focused on benefit for individual business rather than shared economic prosperity.** As the ultimate consumers of a vocationally skilled workforce employers need to substantially lift their contribution to funding the development of the skills that they profit from and move away from a dependency on incentives.
82. **Significant drops in apprentice and trainee numbers partially driven by the unaddressed completions crisis in some qualifications.** Apprentice and traineeship completions have continued to decline across the Australian economy, resulting in tens of thousands fewer skilled workers entering the workforce each year and worsening the skills shortages faced in some industries. Apprentices are not provided with adequate support and mentoring through the Australian Apprenticeship Support Networks (AASNs). In many cases, apprentice wages are insufficient to cover basic living costs, including food, travel and housing. The cause of apprentice and trainee high non-completions needs to be identified and addressed before completion rates can be improved.
83. **A lack of training places.** due to a failure to invest in the VET sector over many years, there is a lack of available training places, leading to long waiting lists in some sectors for apprentices to start training. Jobs and Skills Australia should have a role in not only identifying skills shortages, but in providing

advice on how and where to create the additional places that are required to fill them. Consideration should also be given to how the lack of culturally appropriate accommodation, particularly in regional and rural areas, contributes to a lack of training places.

84. **The high cost of VET courses to students and the second-class nature of the VET system.** VET courses have increased in cost to students as cost-shifting from some state governments has occurred. VET also struggles to attract students due to a cultural bias towards university education.
85. **A lack of effective support for mid-career training.** Most VET students undertake courses at the beginning of their careers but receive little support from employers or government to undertake additional training to respond to changing skills needs in their job or a desire to upskill. While post trade qualifications are already available within most training packages, these are rarely offered due to existing trainer shortages and the higher cost to deliver specialized training.
86. **The increased leakage of higher education terminology into the VET system, without establishing a VET specific meaning.** Congress notes, that in the VET sector, the principles that should be applied to a microcredential is that it is a unit (or units) of competency that has been: endorsed by industry (employers and unions); adopted into a training package; delivered consistent with the rules of that training package; and delivered by a registered training organization. Furthermore, in order for a micro-credential to be approved for delivery it:
 - a. must not duplicate existing training package products;
 - b. must be developed in consultation with industry and the Relevant Jobs and Skills Council to avoid duplication;
 - c. must be endorsed by industry through the Jobs and Skills Council (or equivalent);
 - d. must be registered following an external quality assurance process that involves industry;
 - e. must be referred to the relevant Jobs and Skills Council for consideration of conversion into a nationally recognised training product;
 - f. must not be used to avoid or undermine training package standards; and maintain records sufficient to support a formal review of their effectiveness in meeting industry skills needs;
 - g. must be delivered by a registered training organization;
 - h. must be subject to audit;
 - i. must result in an actual credential that specifies its value for recognition and portability (i.e. its relationship to the AQF), its duration and any credit arrangements it has attracted.
87. **The emergence of proprietary training:** Congress notes that many private providers have developed their business model around proprietary training models, whereby they receive public funding for training, but the training offering is not actually available to the public. Often the provider seeks to deliver the training in a bespoke fashion to an individual large employer under a model which largely sees the private RTO acting as a conduit to securing public funding to already profitable companies rather than as a provider of publicly accessible training products. Members of the public are excluded from accessing these training programs, as are the workers of other small businesses whose staff would equally benefit from upskilling opportunities. Furthermore, proprietary training programs may not provide students with recognized or transferable skills, tying them to the original employer.

Systemic Solutions to the Issues in the System

88. Congress believes:
 - a. increased investment in vocational education and training and skills development is critical to:
 - improving Australia's productivity performance;
 - meeting the skill needs of Australian businesses;

- providing Australians with access to higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs, more fulfilling work and expanded future career opportunities; and
- the creation of an equitable and sustainable society.

b. This investment is a shared responsibility.

89. The Government's moves to improve the investment in VET and to increase the focus on funding TAFE through the National Skills Agreement is a welcome step in addressing the historic underfunding of VET and the marginalisation of TAFE. Unions will monitor the impact of the new agreement and will continue to advocate for a fully-funded VET system commensurate with its economic importance.
90. Congress supports the establishment of a funded National Skills Crisis Contingency Fund which is available to boost the supply of skills when a crisis arises and the supply of skills needs an additional boost to address a skills deficit. Demand forecasting is rarely perfect and there are bound to be skills deficits arising that need immediate funding to get back on track. The establishment of such a fund should not be used to undermine existing skills funding arrangements and any use of the funds should be directed by the relevant JSC.
91. Governments have an obligation to ensure that all vocational education and training is provided in modern facilities using current equipment. Government should establish a \$3 billion fund, to be allocated over three years, to support capital improvements in the TAFE system, including updating and modernising existing facilities, and expanding TAFE facilities (with a particular focus in regional areas). A proportionate allocation of capital funding should be allocated to union-endorsed not-for-profit training organisations.
92. Congress calls for an overhaul of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment as the minimum qualification for VET teachers. A high-quality education can only be achieved if VET teachers have expertise in the subject matter being taught, including industry practice, as well as a strong foundation in teaching and learning practice, not just compliance.
93. Congress asserts that the minimum qualification for TAFE teachers should be a degree plus experience. We urge TAFEs to assist teachers to undertake their degree and to provide ongoing professional development to all trainers. VET teachers teaching certificate level qualifications should hold minimum of a Certificate IV plus experience.
94. Congress affirms that employers must also assume responsibility, including financial responsibility, for developing the skills that their business then benefits from. Co-contribution mechanisms and industry training levies associated with nationally recognised training are among the options that should be utilised, as well as measures to improve business capability in identifying their skill needs.
95. Congress calls for a national inquiry into funding for the TAFE and vocational education and training sector to establish an adequate funding rate to ensure high quality delivery. Public funding for vocational education and training should be commensurate with funding directed to other sectors of education. The inquiry should also consider whether the involvement of for-profit organisations in VET has delivered on the promises that were made at the time the system was opened up to private enterprise – better quality training and a positive student experience at reduced cost.
96. Congress calls for a national discussion between unions, employers and TAFE about the need to develop model National Industry Framework Curriculum, aligned to industry standards.
97. The involvement of for-profit companies in the VET system has funnelled scarce public funds and resources from the sector into the pockets of individuals, and reduced the quality of education and trust in the vocational education and training system. Public funding should not be available to for-profit training providers at all - as is the case with respect to school funding.
98. Congress acknowledges that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' communities in particular those located in regional and remote areas have historically been unable to take full advantage of the VET system because of their remoteness from major centres and government policy settings and funding cuts which have impacted on the provision of VET. Public funding of TAFE in regional and remote areas should be a priority and allow:
 - a. students to have the support they need from family, community, trainers and each other;

- b. communities to own and be involved in the development and delivery of training;
- c. cultural knowledge and language to be respected and integral to the training; and
- d. communities and students to be sure that training will lead to sustainable employment.

Tripartite leadership of VET

- 99. Ensuring that industry, both employers and unions, are central to decision making around training package development and the direction of the VET system is critical to ensuring it continues to deliver relevant and high-quality vocational education and training.
- 100. The establishment of the Jobs and Skills Councils and the establishment of a tripartite advisory board to Jobs and Skills Australia are welcome developments in restoring industry to its rightful place in the VET system.
- 101. This does not mean however that this work is completed. The JSCs must continue to operate in a tripartite manner as they undertake their work and should play a central role in VET reforms going forward – ensuring that the tripartite voice of industry is heard.
- 102. Congress also calls on Government to expand tripartism by, alongside commensurate funding increases, expanding the role of the JSCs or the creation of other tripartite organisations within the VET system. This should include consideration of the role that JSCs or these organisations can play in the mentoring of apprentices and the assessment of VET students.
- 103. Congress calls on the Government to continue to meet their commitment to tripartism and ensure that all ongoing and future VET reform projects reflect the consensus views of industry in their design and implementation. Industry cannot be considered as merely ‘another stakeholder’ in consultations regarding VET matters.

Work-Based Training

- 104. Work-based training, which includes apprenticeships, traineeships and other training such as work placements, is a critical element in skills acquisition for many industries and should not be watered down or reduced in scope. Additionally, where industry representatives agree that Training Contract and other forms of employment-based training should be mandated, this should occur without interference.
- 105. Apprentices must be provided with access to a variety of elective choices, and have access to industry experts to inform their choice of electives and signing training contacts. Congress notes that too often, apprentices are only offered the electives offered by their local RTO, which may be the cheapest, simplest option.
- 106. In some sectors where employers have restricted funding or small margins, work-based placements are in short supply. These shortages are exacerbated in regional, rural, and remote areas. Congress calls for greater support to make on-the-job training more readily available through industry placements and apprenticeships in these sectors.
- 107. Work-based training is most successful when individuals have access to consistent and adequate supervision. Practical training of this nature is made possible when resources and workforce planning support one-on-one supervision where possible and a 1:3 supervisor to apprentice ratio at most. This is achieved through measures such as backfilling rosters, mentoring programs, and support provided to the existing workforce to assist and run trainee and student placements.
- 108. It must also be acknowledged that work-based training and work placements, particularly when unpaid as is common in healthcare, can place a high cost burden on people undertaking training. This can include transportation and accommodation costs as well as a need to forgo income from other employment. These costs can act as disincentive for people to undertake training – particularly for women, migrants and other disadvantaged cohorts. Consideration should be given to reducing this cost burden as much as is practical.
- 109. Congress recognises that work-based training is not possible in all industries or is unable to cover the full breadth of all workplace activities in some industries. In those cases, Government must recognise

the importance of workplace simulation and other measures, where they are designed and agreed to by employers and unions, to deliver critical workplace skills.

110. Congress is concerned that apprentice wage subsidies have been abused by employers, primarily through churning through apprentices to gain a subsidy, to the detriment of apprentices and the economy. Wage subsidy programs should be better targeted, include payment schedules that discourage churning and be designed to support apprentice completion. As an additional protection against bad behaviour, when an apprentice changes employer, their subsidy should move with them. Government must require and incentivise greater employment of apprentices on government projects. Congress notes that government is currently consulting on the development of the Australian Skills Guarantee which, if properly designed, should also act as a significant catalyst for apprentice employment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' education

111. Congress supports the vision for education articulated in the 2019 Mparntwe Alice Springs Declaration for the Australian education system as one which ensures:
- all students learn about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures; and
 - all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thrive in education and in life.
112. Congress calls on governments to commit to implementing a long-term vision for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which provides policy stability, funding certainty and improves transparency and accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.
113. Congress calls on all governments to ensure that all education systems and workplaces are free of racism.
114. The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, as experts in both systems knowledge and cultural knowledges, are centred in all aspects of policy-making and program development and provision and these educators are remunerated for their cultural and colonial load.
115. Congress supports the call of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to ensure that:
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures and histories are embedded in all areas of the curriculum across all content areas and all sectors of the Australian education system;
 - the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is prioritised across all areas and sectors of the Australian education system; and
 - all employees in the Australian education sector are committed to the elimination of racism and discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are actively working towards this goal.

Higher Education

116. Congress affirms that Australia must maintain and continue to improve our high quality and equitable public university system, where opportunities to complete higher education qualifications are available throughout the country.
117. Congress affirms that access to higher education must be equitable and merit based for Australia to become a strong, smart economy and society of the future.
118. Congress recognises and affirms that publicly funded universities must act in the public interest and for the public good.

119. Congress recognises that universities not only contribute economically to Australia's prosperity, but are a core social and cultural institution in providing education and research. Along with the CSIRO, universities are the site of basic research which is depended upon for the breakthroughs and innovations that address the big issues of our times.
120. Congress calls on the Federal Government to overturn a decade of Coalition higher education policy that has resulted in decreased levels of public funding in public universities, shifted the cost burden for university education onto the shoulders of students and their families and led to excessive student debt. The Universities Accord Review has provided a blueprint for Governments at both Federal and State/Territory level to enact much needed reform, and recommendations should be adopted in consultation with tertiary education workers, students and unions.
121. Congress notes that Australia's public investment in higher education is still well below that of other industrialised economies and Australian students currently pay amongst the highest fees in the world to attend public universities. Congress notes that, although universities are public institutions and are highly regulated by government, public grants only account for about one third of their income, with the remainder derived from international student fees (about one dollar in five), as well as domestic student income, research grants, and investment/other income.
122. Congress supports an immediate increase in public investment in higher education to cover the costs of educating students from diverse backgrounds and regions across Australia. Public investment in Australia's public universities should be increased to the equivalent of 1 per cent of GDP, from the current 0.7 per cent. Such an increase will put Australia on a more even footing with other industrialised economies.
123. In line with the recommendations from the Universities Accord report following a comprehensive review of tertiary education, the Federal Government's reforms must provide our public universities with a stable, sustainable and equitable funding model that gives both government and universities some certainty in planning, and that takes into account student, community, professional and industry demand and needs.
124. Congress supports recommendation 34 of the Universities Accord report to commission an Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander led review of higher education in consultation with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups to ensure that Australian universities are imbedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Knowledges and perspectives and are inclusive places welcoming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
125. Congress notes that higher education is one of the most highly casualised industries in Australia and that while the full time equivalent proportion of Casual employees account for one in five full time equivalent (FTE) employees, in real headcount terms around half of higher education workers are casual. Furthermore, it is also acknowledged that insecure higher education employment is gendered, with research showing women in higher education are more likely than men to be employed on fixed term or casual contracts. Conversely however, women working in higher education are under-represented at senior levels, in all work functions.
126. Congress also noted that eight out of ten FTE teaching-only employees are employed on a casual basis, and that union-led research has found that 40 per cent of casual academic work is unpaid. Casualisation of university teaching adversely impacts upon the students, academics and the quality of education. It also leads to the sector-wide practice of underpayment and wage theft.
127. Congress calls on the Federal Government to take action through the Universities Accord reforms to ensure that universities act as exemplary employers and that endemic wage theft and 'gig employment' practices in the sector are ended.
128. Congress also notes that whilst universities are relied upon to undertake basic and applied research, the funding remains inadequate to cover the costs of research. Of the significant increase in research-only staff over the past decade, eight out of ten are employed on fixed term contracts, which adversely impacts upon research careers and capacity. Congress expresses deep concern that fixed term employment among those working in universities is now over 10 times more prevalent than in the broader economy.

129. Congress acknowledges that, as the third largest export industry in Australia, the tertiary education sector is integral to the economic wellbeing of the nation. Universities constitute the largest component of the sector generating in excess of \$20 billion annually in export income.
130. Congress acknowledges that reliance by universities and others in the tertiary sector on international student fee income exposes the sector to volatility in the market and fluctuations in currency rates. As shown by the COVID-19 pandemic, any downturns in the market will result in significant job losses, which, given the scope of the sector, will impact negatively on the Australian economy more broadly.
131. Congress condemns the decision by the Coalition when in Government to exclude universities from support during the COVID-19 pandemic, with thousands of job losses across the sector resulting from the former Government's handling of the sector during the crisis.
132. Congress recognises that expanding higher education opportunities across the population requires more than just enabling enrolment. To facilitate the successful completion of qualifications by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, Congress supports:
- a. The abolition of tuition fees;
 - b. An increase and expansion of student income support;
 - c. An increase in Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) funding to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students get the best possible outcomes from Higher education to redress past injustices;
 - d. A requirement that all institutions in receipt of government subsidies for teaching and learning to develop programs aimed at improving the participation rates of students from lower socio-economic status, including specifically targeting the increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
 - e. A requirement that institutions levying the Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) ensure independent and democratic student representation and provide adequate funding to support student support, welfare and advocacy services.
133. Congress affirms support for staff and student representation on university governing bodies noting the UNESCO 1977 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. Higher education personnel should have the right and opportunity, without discrimination of any kind to participate in governing bodies. They should be free to criticise the functioning of higher education institutions, including their own, while respecting the right of other sections of the academic community. They should also have the right to elect the majority of representatives to academic bodies within the higher education institution.
134. Congress notes that intellectual freedom and institutional autonomy are intrinsic to maintaining the quality and reputation of our world class universities, and recognises that these principles are enshrined in legislation. Congress, however is concerned that constraints on academic research either through a lack of funding, precarious employment or direction of management may operate as an impediment to the exercise of intellectual freedom.