Child Care Now
Un Enfant Une Place

A vision and roadmap for increasing educator qualifications in licensed child care centres

June 2026

Educators Matter:
Workforce Policy for Quality
Early Learning and Child Care

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A vision and roadmap for supporting a highly qualified early learning and child care workforce in Canada

Developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table

June 2026

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Land acknowledgement

Child Care Now's office is located on the unceded Anishinaabe Algonquin territory but our organization is active on the lands—ceded, unceded and contested—across Turtle Island. As a national advocacy organization, Child Care Now respects and affirms the inherent and Treaty Rights of all Indigenous Peoples across the lands and waters with whom we strive to work in solidarity. Child Care Now commits to the Truth and Reconciliation's 94 calls to action to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation. We note, in particular, Call #12 which calls upon all governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

About this paper

This roadmap was produced as part of "Educators Matter: Workforce Policy for Quality Early Learning and Child Care," a three-year project (2023–2026) committed to advancing collective knowledge on Canada's early learning and child care (ELCC) workforce and developing policy proposals in support of high quality Canada-wide early learning and child care. This project is made possible through funding from a private foundation and made in memory of John and Susanne Graham.

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About this roadmap

Building a quality public early learning and child care (ELCC) system requires a highly qualified, well-supported, and properly compensated workforce. Developing and supporting such a workforce requires clarifying and reimagining employment roles, scopes of practice, and competencies. It also requires all governments, post-secondary institutions, and service providers to work together on a clear plan to increase qualifications, provide meaningful professional learning, and ensure workplace supports are in place.

A highly qualified workforce raises the quality of programs, lowers staff turnover rates, reduces stress and burnout of educators, and helps foster conditions that support the wellbeing of children. Working conditions for educators are improved when scopes of practice and competencies are clear. Educators' working conditions, which are partly informed by the qualifications of all staff, are children's learning environments.

As part of their recommendations for quality early learning and universal child care, advocates have published policy roadmaps[1] that outline the need to increase educational qualifications, widen access to post-secondary programs, and provide comprehensive professional learning opportunities, while also calling for decent wages and working conditions. These calls to action are also addressed in the *Wages, Benefits and Pensions: Policy Recommendations Developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table* and highlight how compensation, qualifications, and related scopes of practice should be integrated as part of a comprehensive workforce strategy.[2]

A vision and roadmap for increasing educator qualifications in licensed child care centres puts forward a national vision and roadmap for supporting and elevating the qualifications of the ELCC workforce through policy change. This paper has been developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table as part of the Educators Matter: Workforce Policy for Quality Early Learning and Child Care

1 Childcare Resource and Research Unit (2024). *Building Canada's child care system, policy roadmaps*

2 Child Care Now (2024). *Wages, benefits and pensions: Policy recommendations developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table.*

project. It reflects the input received through consultation discussions with early childhood educators and others employed in the sector at the Educators Matter National Symposium held in October 2025 and through facilitated online discussions in January and February 2026 (described in Appendix 2).

Family home child care

The vision and roadmap primarily focus on increasing the qualifications of educators who work in licensed, centre-based ELCC environments. While a highly qualified family home child care workforce is also sorely needed, more work needs to be done to propose a unique vision, roadmap, and recommendations for policy change for this sector of the workforce. However, this document proposes a starting point for imagining overlapping educator roles, scopes of practice, and competencies, some of which could apply to those working in the family home child care sector and inform a future vision.

Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and learning

The vision and roadmap are mostly informed by current Western and colonial systems of educational training and the acquisition of skills and knowledge. However, we recognize the importance of honouring and reflecting the range of knowledge systems and professional learning approaches across the sector and, specifically, the need to include Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and learning and unique family, cultural, and language contexts. Child Care Now and the Workforce Policy Table recognize and acknowledge that only Indigenous peoples, Nations, and communities have the right to determine a vision, framework, and policies with respect to Indigenous ELCC. We believe it is the responsibility of the ELCC sector to collaborate under the leadership of Indigenous peoples, Nations, and communities to develop new approaches to educator qualifications and to embed existing Indigenous knowledges, practices, and frameworks into the vision and roadmap.

Key Terms

Throughout this document, several key terms are used frequently: competency(ies), employment role, professional learning, qualifications, and scope of practice. The definitions for these terms are listed below. Other terms and phrases can be found in Appendix 3: Glossary of Terms.

Competency (ies)

The term "competencies" broadly refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and values required of the workforce in ELCC settings. Required competencies for the workforce (e.g. early childhood educators) are often informed by the vocational outcomes set out by provincial/territorial educational training standards and reinforced by post-secondary educational programs.

Employment role

The term "employment role" refers to the specific position an employee holds within an organization. It defines the responsibilities and tasks, the scope of practice, required skills and competencies, and expected performance standards for that particular position.

Professional learning

The term "professional learning" refers to the opportunities educators and care professionals can participate in to enhance their skills, develop strategies, and learn practices from experts. Professional learning can happen in different ways, including in-person sessions, online workshops, independent research/study, etc.

Qualifications

The term "qualifications" is used broadly and includes but is not limited to:

- educational qualifications or credentials (i.e. certificate, diploma, or degree);
- skills, knowledge, abilities, values (i.e. competencies);
- additional certifications and formal and informal professional learning (e.g. First Aid and CPR training, food safety training, additional qualification (AQ) courses, micro-credentials, mentorship, workplace training etc.);
- Indigenous ways of knowing and being; and
- local, community, and cultural requirements (e.g. specific knowledge systems, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion knowledge and skills, anti-racism, French language, supporting newcomer children and families, etc.).

Scope of practice

The term "scope of practice" refers to the definition provided in the National ELCC Workforce Policy Table's recommendations on wages, benefits, and pensions, which states that it is "the range of responsibilities, duties, and activities that an ECE or assistant is trained, qualified, and authorized to perform within child care settings. It is often defined by legislation, professional associations, and sometimes by regulatory bodies."[3]

3 Child Care Now (2024). *Wages, benefits and pensions: Policy recommendations developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table*, p.12

Where are we now?

Educator qualifications and the current context

Low educational qualifications across Canada

As of 2025, 10 out of the 13 provinces and territories required all staff in ELCC centre-based programs to have some kind of early childhood educator (ECE)-related training, such as an orientation level course.[4] Six jurisdictions deem qualified staff as all those holding a one-year ECE certificate, and only four jurisdictions require a two-year or three-year ECE diploma to be considered qualified. Additionally, only six provinces require child care centre supervisors to hold a two-year ECE diploma or a four-year degree.[5]

With only a small portion of staff in licensed child care centres across Canada required to hold a one-, two-, or three-year ECE-related education qualification to meet provincial and territorial licensing requirements, the educational qualifications of the ELCC workforce overall are generally low.

Only nine out of the 13 provincial and territorial Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreements prioritize meeting minimal educational qualifications, with general targets for 60% of the workforce to acquire some type of certification (e.g. Level 1) by 2025 – 2026.[6] As such, most provinces and territories currently do not even meet their own low regulatory requirements.

While some provinces, like Nova Scotia,[7] have indicated meeting qualifications targets to 70% or, in Newfoundland,[8] to 80%, there is currently no data to support these targets being met, nor are there significant regulatory or other policy changes to enable implementation. In Ontario, a recent report by the Auditor General confirmed that Ontario is not on track to meet the 60% target of qualified ECEs. In fact, since 2018 the percentage of qualified staff in ELCC has trended downward, with only a marginal increase in qualified ECEs between 2023 and

4 Friendly, M., Beach, J., Aruran, G., Cossette, A., Hu, L., Lillace, J., & Forer, B. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*. Childcare Resource and Research Unit, p. 442.

5 Friendly, et al. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*.

6 Government of Canada (2021). *Early Learning and Child Care Agreements*.

7 Government of Nova Scotia (2023). *Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement 2023 – 2024 to 2025 – 2026 Action Plan*.

8 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2024). Play, learn and grow: Newfoundland and Labrador Early Learning Action Plan.

2024, despite the commitments laid out in the provincial-federal agreement signed in 2022.[9]

Furthermore, the recent Auditor General Report of Canada on the CWELCC program noted that while there have been some improvements to quality initiatives, such as the development of wage grids in some provinces and territories, and an increase in supports for professional development, most provincial and territorial governments have provided little data to show if they are on track to meet ELCC workforce certification targets outlined in their action plans.[10]

Unfortunately, as noted in *A Summary of ELCC Workforce Policies as of December 2023 Under the Canada-Wide Child Care System*, there continues to be a critical lack of planning and vision in the CWELCC agreements about the steps and coordination required to increase the educational qualifications set out in the targets and a lack of clarity on what being qualified means at the national level.[11] There is also a great deal of variation across the provinces and territories about what types of minimum educational qualifications are required at the room and centre level and a range of allowable regulatory exemptions.[12]

Canada compared to international standards

Historically, Canada has ranked very low for ELCC workforce qualification standards. According to the *International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011*, which provides classification criteria for defining quality early childhood education programs for children, all staff must have pedagogical knowledge and skills.[13] As most provinces and territories do not require all staff to have a educational qualification in an ECE post-secondary program, [14] this standard for pedagogical qualifications for the workforce is not being met.

The 2008 UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 8 placed Canada in the bottom two out of 25 OECD countries for meeting international standards for early childhood services. In 2008, Canada did not meet benchmark five, which says that 80% of all staff in a program should have a minimum level of education.[15] While advancements in ELCC system-building have occurred with the introduction of the CWELCC, 18 years later, Canada still does not meet UNICEF's Report Card benchmark five.

Employment roles, scopes of practice, and educator competencies

Employment roles, scopes of practice, and educator competencies are critical elements in determining (and increasing) educational qualification requirements for any workforce. The former Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) published a number of comprehensive resources and reports

9 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2025). *Performance audit: Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Program - Special Report 2025*, p. 40.

10 Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2025). 2025 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada: Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system, p. 14.

11 Child Care Now (2024). *A summary of early learning and child care workforce policies as of December 2023 under the Canada-wide child care system*.

12 Friendly, et al. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*.

13 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011). *International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011*, p. 27.

14 Friendly, et al. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*.

15 UNICEF (2008). *Innocenti Report Card 8*.

in 2007,[16] 2009,[17] and 2010[18] that offered a review, analyses, and recommendations for education and professional learning programs. These reports defined roles, competencies, and occupational standards, and created pathways for credentialing. These resources continue to reflect the current provincial and territorial differences between certification levels, job roles, scopes of practice, and competencies.

As of 2025, nine provinces and territories had some type of certification process in place to classify educators by their educational qualifications or, in the case of Ontario, enable them to be registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators.[19]

Federally, the National Occupational Classification (NOC) for ECEs and other employment roles, such as assistant or other child care support staff, are intended to provide the workforce and the public with some guidance on what ELCC practice entails. According to the NOC codes, ECEs are required to have a two- to four-year diploma or degree with roles and skills that include developing, leading, and implementing early childhood education programs. Assistants on the other hand, are required to have a high school diploma with a possible certificate in ECE-related education and child care work experience. Though loosely defined, assistants are expected to support and assist in the implementation of early childhood education programs[20].

Despite the distinctions provided under the NOC codes, there is not often a significant separation between the roles within job descriptions, nor is there a clear demarcation of tasks and skills within workplaces. Furthermore, the variation in classification levels and qualification requirements across Canada indicate there are no clear national standards for employment roles and qualifications for ECEs and others working in licensed centre-based child care.

The competencies for the ELCC workforce are largely informed by the CCHRSC's 2010 *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*, which also informs the vocational outcomes set by provincial/territorial ministries or departments for ECE post-secondary education. Post-secondary institutions that offer ECE diplomas and degrees often draw from these standards in crafting their programs and competencies.

Broadly, the competencies, scope of practice, and employment tasks for ECEs, outlined by the CCHRC, focus on the following:

- child development learning and care;
- equipment and facilities;
- family and community relations;
- professional relationships, and personal and professional development; and
- record keeping.[21]

Provincial and territorial competency frameworks and codes of ethics and standards[22] provide comprehensive overviews of ECE competencies; related to systems knowledge, advocacy work, building responsive relationships,

16 Beach, J., & Flanagan, K. (2007). *People, programs and practices: A training strategy for the early childhood education and care sector in Canada*. Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

17 Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2009). *Occupational standards for early childhood educators*.

18 Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2010). *Pathways to early childhood education credentialing in Canada*.

19 Friendly, et al. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*.

20 Government of Canada (2021). *42202 – Early childhood educators and assistants, National Occupational Classification, Version 1.0 2021*

21 Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2009). *Occupational standards for early childhood educators*, p.7.

22 See for example, Canadian Child Care Federation (2002). *Code of ethics*; College of Early Childhood Educators (2017), *Code of ethics and standards of practice*; Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (2021), Code of ethics (7th ed.); Government of British Columbia (2001), *BC child care sector occupational competencies*; Manitoba Child Care Association (2025). *MCCA code of ethics*

demonstrating leadership, upholding and recognizing children's rights, and the inherent rights of Indigenous children, families, and communities. However, these same competency frameworks have not been developed for those in other ELCC employment roles (e.g. assistants, supervisors, pedagogical leaders, inclusion supports/resource consultants, program directors etc.). Even less clear is how additional competencies might align with varying educational qualifications for these other roles.

Educator wellbeing, recruitment, and retention

Educator wellbeing directly correlates with the educational qualifications, roles, and competencies required to work in ELCC programs. The OECD's *Building a High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce: Further Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018* highlighted that low educational qualifications and low training opportunities are linked to burnout, stress, low self-efficacy, and emotional exhaustion for the workforce.[23]

A recent Australian study found that when educational qualifications were disproportionately low in ELCC programs, retention was an issue for all staff. The few with higher qualifications, and therefore increased responsibilities and workload, were inclined to leave the sector due to burnout. Those with low qualifications, and therefore working without the necessary knowledge and skills, or low self-efficacy, were also leaving their positions for jobs that paid comparably but did not carry the same burden of responsibility and competency requirements.[24]

Amidst the recruitment and retention crisis of the ELCC workforce across Canada, the findings from the Australian study and the 2020 OECD report echo the voices of the workforce here. In a recent news article out of British Columbia, one ECE faculty member said that the number of staff in ELCC programs with low qualifications, "is causing our ECEs [a] great deal of burnout because they're filling in the gaps and they're having to compensate for this under qualification."[25] The Muttart Foundation's research on the Alberta workforce in 2024 also highlighted this issue, indicating that the high turnover rates of qualified staff negatively impacts the working conditions of those less qualified staff that remain working in programs, while also compromising the quality of programming for children and families.[26]

23 OECD (2020). *Building a high-quality early childhood education and care workforce: Further results from the Starting Strong survey 2018*, TALIS.

24 Bull, R., McFarland, L., Cumming, T., & Wong, S. (June 2024). The impact of work-related wellbeing and workplace culture and climate on intention to leave in the early childhood sector, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 69*, 13–24.

25 Dawson, J. (2024, October 23). Kamloops early childhood educators call on ministry to standardize qualifications, Castanet.net

26 Muttart Foundation (2024). *Strategies to improve the total compensation and working conditions of certified early childhood educators in Alberta*.

While the implementation of strong wage grids, comprehensive benefits, and pensions are key to alleviating the poor working conditions and the loss of qualified staff, ongoing and properly funded professional learning is another key strategy to address this crisis. Many provinces and territories are now providing significant funding for ongoing professional learning as part of their federal-provincial CWELCC action plans;[27] however, research[28, 29] shows that ongoing, relational, and collaborative learning in practice is more meaningful and effective than singular and outside-of-work workshops.

One recent report[30] highlighted the importance of a framework for ongoing professional learning. Findings from a recent study from Prince Edward Island on recruitment and retention showed that, in tandem with employer support, government funding for professional learning increases broad qualifications while also strengthening competencies and contributing to improved wellbeing and retention in the sector.[31]

While professional learning is often given lip service across the sector, there are few provincial and territorial requirements for meaningful engagement in ongoing professional learning. The *ECEC in Canada 2025* report noted that some provinces have mandated a small number of professional learning hours to be completed annually.[32] However, this requirement is not enough to support wellbeing, recruitment, and retention, nor is it sufficient to adequately contribute to increasing broad qualifications across all ELCC employment roles.

27 Government of Canada (2021). *Early Learning and Child Care Agreements*.

28 Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., & Van Laere, K. (2011). *CoRe: Competence requirements in early childhood education and care*. European Commission: DG Education and Culture

29 OECD (2020). *Building a high-quality early childhood education and care workforce: Further results from the Starting Strong survey 2018*, TALIS.

30 Lalonde, L. Kaid, B., Raudsuss, H., Groom-Pike, J., Dumbrille, A., Publow, K., & Crogie, M. (2025). *Reimagine professional learning: An engagement with early learning professionals in Canada*.

31 Kathleen Flanagan & Associates. (January 2024). *Early Learning and Child Care Recruitment and Retention: PEI'S 2024 Director and Staff Surveys-Final Report*, Early Childhood Association of PEI.

32 Friendly, et al. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*.

What challenges and complexities do we face in increasing qualifications?

There are several challenges and complexities to increasing qualifications for the ELCC workforce across Canada. Regulatory amendments, an influx of public funding, multi- and cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration, and wide-scale system visioning through workforce engagement are required to address the complexities of increasing workforce qualifications.

Key challenges include:

Provincial and territorial variations

- Legislative and regulatory variations, including allowable exemptions for ECE-related educational qualifications and director approval;
- Legislative and regulatory variations to staff:child ratios and how many qualified staff are required at both the group and centre-level in licensed child care centres;
- Definitions of maximum or highest educational qualifications required to work in centre-based, licensed child care centres and considerations on whether these maximums are too low;
- Definitions of workforce competencies, scopes of practice, and employment roles, all of which may or may not be correlated with educational qualifications; and
- Potential equivalencies with educational qualifications, including accreditation processes and recognition of prior learning both within ECE-related training and work experience, and issues of credential equivalencies where the education is wholly unrelated to ECE scopes of practice.

Post-secondary access and capacity

- Access to post-secondary institutions and training programs, including more program structures/options to complete the required educational credentials, particularly for those working in remote and rural locations; and
- Capacity of post-secondary institutions to increase delivery and tailor training to meet workforce needs. Elements of post-secondary capacity include number of qualified course instructors, specialized courses and programs (e.g. infant education, resource consulting/ inclusion support, administrative) that are localized and culturally relevant, opportunities for hands-on training opportunities, and support for students during placements.

Community needs, practice realities, and compensation

- Unique local, regional, and community contexts (e.g. rural, remote) that require training, skills, and knowledge that is specific to communities (e.g. Indigenous early learning frameworks, language, culture, and knowledge systems);
- Clear understanding of practice realities, and the diversity and complexity of the work of the ELCC workforce to ensure broad qualifications accurately reflect the diversity and current needs of practice (e.g. employment roles, scopes of practice, competencies, and educational qualifications); and
- Wage grid discrepancies and a lack of alignment with employment roles and increasing qualifications.

What can we learn from others?

Implementation approaches for increasing qualifications from the international ELCC community

Government commitment and action: Timelines, regulatory updates, and public funding

One promising example for increasing educational qualifications is New Zealand's 2002 10-year strategic plan, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*, which set out strategies to increase the number of ECEs with educational qualifications. Within five years of the plan launch (2002–2007), 50% of all staff working in ELCC settings were required to hold an educational qualification. Within the next three years (2007 – 2010) the target increased to 80% and then to 100% by 2012.[33]

Although the 100% target was later removed, the significant influx of public funding to support these targets largely worked, resulting in an increase of qualified staff by 15% within the first three years. As targets and public funding increased, proposed regulatory amendments occurred simultaneously. While funds were allocated based on several factors, such as the ages of children and service type, higher funding amounts were distributed to providers who reached the staff qualification targets, thereby also supporting wage increases. In their recent report, *The Early Learning and Action Plan: Progress Toward Goals in 2023*, 69% of staff held an educational qualification.[34]

In New Zealand, clear timelines, significant increases of public funding, and simultaneous regulatory changes supported increasing educational qualifications.

Staged, staggered, and targeted approaches to increasing educational qualifications

Since the mid-1990s, researchers[35,36] have discussed the importance of international recommendations[37] for setting and committing to clear targets for increasing the educational qualifications of staff working in ELCC. They noted that in order to build a quality system, develop the workforce, and ensure equal access to ELCC for all children, workforce qualification targets are needed to ensure that educators receive the education they require to do their jobs. These recommendations acknowledge that qualification targets are as much about quality ELCC systems and programs as they are about educators having a right to access additional education and training.

In recent years, several OECD reports[38,39] and a European Commission report[40] have continued

33 Government of New Zealand, Ministry of Education (2002). *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki*.

34 Government of New Zealand, Ministry of Education (2023). *The early learning and action plan: Progress toward goals in 2023*.

35 Childcare Resource and Research Unit (2024, November). *Briefing Note: Quality targets in services for young children: Summary*. See Target 26, p. 3.

36 Urban, M. (2015). *Starting wrong? The trouble with a debate that just won't go away*, p. 8.

37 European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women (January 1996). *Quality targets in services for young children*. (Made available by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit).

38 OECD (2019). *Good practice for good jobs in early childhood education and care*.

39 OECD (2022). *Strengthening early childhood education and care in Luxembourg: A focus on non-formal education*

40 European Commission (2021). *Early childhood education and care: How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff: Final report*.

this work on a more granular level with a focus on employment roles, suggesting that staged, staggered, and targeted approaches for increasing educational qualifications for the ELCC workforce are most effective, feasible, and sustainable.

Recommendations include the introduction of new minimum educational qualifications by first prioritizing those in supervisory or leadership positions such as centre directors (e.g. England, Norway, Germany).[41] Others suggest that specialized or differentiated educational qualifications must align with unique employment roles and responsibilities in ELCC environments, whereby one broad qualification (i.e. a degree or a diploma) is not sufficient for the complexity of the diverse work.[42]

Prioritizing alternative pathways, mandatory professional learning, and workplace support

While government action that prioritizes public funding and staged, staggered, and targeted regulatory changes are important strategies for increasing ELCC educational qualifications, learning through alternative methods, such as required professional learning and workplace training support, is an important component as well.

Several OECD reports suggest the use of "alternative pathways"[43] (moving from untrained to trained) or "diversifying and expanding pathways into the profession"[44] to increase qualifications. These approaches suggest there could be potential equivalencies between work experience and recognition of similar education from outside of the ELCC sector to formal ECE-related educational qualifications. These reports also suggest that continuous professional learning in ECE-related subjects should be required for all ELCC staff and that less qualified staff should formally work toward increasing educational qualifications or specific certifications such as "micro-credits" or micro-credentials for the untrained.[45]

Formally recognized as equivalent to educational qualifications or not, there is general consensus among numerous international papers, reports, and competency frameworks that mandatory professional learning for the workforce is as important as formal educational qualifications. When describing key competencies, both the 2019 OECD report and the 2011 report, *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*, highlighted that ELCC workforce competencies in all employment roles are developed primarily through critical reflection and professional learning in relational, process-oriented, and in-practice work.[46,47] Norway's 2018 competence strategy described competencies as multifaceted and tailored to individuals and employment roles, and placed significant responsibility on employers and workplaces to support and facilitate staff learning.[48]

Importantly, the 2011 CoRe report calls for the development of a competent workforce system to ensure and support the attainment of high educational qualifications and to create the conditions for decent work and meaningful professional learning opportunities.[49]

41 OECD (2019). *Good practice for good jobs in early childhood education and care*.
42 OECD (2022). Strengthening early childhood education and care in Luxembourg
43 OECD (2019). *Good practice for good jobs in early childhood education and care*, p. 25.
44 European Commission (2021). *Early childhood education and care*, p. 32.
45 OECD (2022). *Strengthening early childhood education and care in Luxembourg*, p. 59.
46 OECD (2019). *Good practice for good jobs in early childhood education and care*
47 Urban, et al. (2011). *CoRe: Competence requirements in early childhood education and care*.
48 Government of Norway, Ministry of Education and Research (2018). *Competencies for tomorrow's kindergartens*
49 Urban, et al. (2011). *CoRe: Competence requirements in early childhood education and care*.

What do we imagine?

A vision of a highly qualified ELCC workforce

High-quality early learning environments require highly qualified educators with clearly articulated employment roles, scopes of practice, and competencies to reflect and honour the complexity of their work. Multi-faceted and diverse roles are needed to meet the diverse needs and cultural contexts of licensed, centre-based ELCC programs across Canada.

While varied in title, classifications, and levels, in licensed, centre-based ELCC, the current workforce is primarily made up of supervisors, ECEs, ECAs (which also includes roles such as child care assistants or certification levels like trainees, interns, or Level 1s, or untrained educators). Only three provinces and territories (Manitoba, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories) currently use the title and have a classification or certification for the assistant or ECA role.[50]

Within each jurisdiction there is often a patchwork approach of additional roles, such as inclusion support specialists and resources consultants, who often carry enormous case loads and visit centres infrequently. Sometimes there are direct or indirect program partnerships with pedagogical leaders, consultants, or coaches. Some ELCC programs, such as multi-site child care programs, employ additional leadership roles such as program administrators or executive directors who oversee administrative or general operations and report directly to a board of directors. Cooks, care-taking staff, and other administrative personnel are also often employed within child care centres, some of whom may or may not have ECE-related education but also engage with children and families in some capacity.

50 Friendly, et al. (2026). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025*.

Employment roles, competencies, qualifications, and professional learning

Moving toward a highly qualified workforce means developing a streamlined and comprehensive picture of the necessary employment roles, scopes of practice, and competencies that align with educational qualifications and professional learning. As such, the ideal vision does not include staff who are wholly untrained, with job titles or descriptions such as "child care worker" or simply, "responsible adult," and who may or may not have completed a short ECE-related orientation course. How we get there—moving from the untrained to the trained and the qualified to the highly qualified—will be explored in the final section of this paper.

The scope of this vision is focused on six key roles in licensed, centre-based ELCC programs for those whose primary responsibility is to work directly with children and families to plan, support, deliver, and implement early childhood education programs. This vision imagines that all six roles are equipped and educated via comprehensive pre-service practicums to work with children of all age groups in centre-based licensed child care (e.g. infants to school-age programs).

Cooks, caretaking staff, and other administrative positions, though important, are not included in this first phase of reimagining workforce qualifications. This paper focuses on the roles of those working directly with children in an individual child care program, and therefore also does not include a description for multi-site Executive Directors, who are responsible for managing multiple centres at larger organizations. The role of Program Director is used to encompass both those wholly responsible for a standalone centre, and those responsible for one centre that is part of a larger organization.

The following employment roles are fundamental to a well-functioning workforce, ensuring the delivery of high-quality, licensed, centre-based ELCC programs:

1. **Early Childhood Assistants** (ECAs) (also includes roles like Early Childhood Educator Assistant, Child Care Assistant, or similar)
2. **Early Childhood Educators** (ECEs)
3. **Inclusion Support Specialists/ Resource Consultants**
4. **Pedagogical Leaders**
5. **Staff Supervisors**
6. **Program Directors**

These six roles are summarized in the following table, and detailed descriptions of each role and its education requirements can be found in Appendix 1.

Summary of employment roles in licensed centre-based ELCC programs

In addition to requirements listed below, all roles will have ongoing professional learning in:

- Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning
- Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices
- Approaches and practices related to Land/place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development
- Deepening reflective practice and pedagogical knowledge and skills

Role title	Key employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies	Formal education and professional learning requirements
Early childhood assistants (ECAs)	• Demonstrates emerging knowledge and skills in the education and care of children • Supports ECEs and assists in daily care and pedagogical practice • Co-plans, co-constructs, and documents with children, families, staff, and communities	**Short-term vision (1 – 5 years):** One-year ECE certificate **Long-term vision (5 – 10 years):** Two-year ECE diploma **Professional learning** • Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor • Increasing core ELCC knowledge, skills and values required for practice
Early childhood educators (ECEs)	• Demonstrates expert knowledge, skills, and values in the education and care of children • Leads and engages in daily care and pedagogical practice • Provides in-practice support, direction, or coaching or engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentor with other staff (e.g. ECAs) and students when appropriate or needed	**Short-term vision (1 – 5 years):** Two-year ECE diploma **Long-term vision (5 – 10 years):** Four-year ECE degree **Professional learning** • Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor • Supervision and mentorship of other staff and student educators

Role title	Key employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies	Formal education and professional learning requirements
Inclusion support specialists / resource consultants	• Develops supports for individual children and groups regarding inclusion needs to ensure full participation of all children • Modifies environments, plans activities, and provides support tailored to children's individual and group needs • Offers resources and mentors staff on inclusive practices • Liaises with professionals and organizations/agencies beyond the child care centre to ensure children and families receive comprehensive support	**Short-term vision (1 – 5 years):** Two-year ECE diploma with specialized education in inclusion support through either post-secondary education or professional development. **Long-term vision (5 – 10 years):** Four-year ECE degree **Professional learning** • Best practices for supporting children with disabilities, and supporting programs to be inclusive for all • The development and implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in program environments
Pedagogical leaders	• Implements and incorporates early learning frameworks and supports educators with practice • Encourages educators to critically examine, reflect, and question their practice, engage in ongoing professional learning, and modify and experiment based on evidence, reflection, and the principles of relational, ethical care and complex, situated practice • Bridge pedagogical theories and thinking with the practice realities of ELCC settings, ensuring alignment between the program's vision and its implementation	**Short-term vision (1 – 5 years):** Two-year ECE diploma with specialized education through either post-secondary education or through professional development in early years pedagogy. **Long-term vision (5 – 10 years):** Four-year ECE degree **Professional learning** • Current research and theory related to early learning pedagogy and pedagogue/pedagogist practice • Supporting educators in evaluating, documenting, and narrating their practice through metacognition and reflection
Staff supervisors	• Demonstrates expertise in supervising and supporting all staff in ELCC programs • Administrative tasks that include maintaining records, collaborating, and communicating regularly with Program Directors • Liaises, supports, offers resources, and provides leadership to all staff on ELCC care and pedagogical and reflective practice and programing	**Short-term vision (1 – 5 years):** Two-year ECE diploma **Long-term vision (5 – 10 years):** Four-year ECE degree **Professional learning** • Supervision and mentorship of all staff and the onboarding of new staff and students • Administration, human resources, and leadership skills

Role title	Key employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies	Formal education and professional learning requirements
Program directors	• Responsible for the overall management and operation of the child care centre • Maintains required licensing and compliance requirements and establishes and enforces policies and procedures for the centre • Develops and manages budgets, finances, and the centre's financial health • Maintains crucial relationships, including with community partners, parents & families, and the broader community	**Short-term vision (1– 5 years):** Two-year ECE diploma with specialized education, through either post-secondary education or professional development, in leadership and management. **Long-term vision (5 – 10 years):** Four-year ECE degree with a post-diploma or certificate in leadership and management **Professional learning** • Provincial/territorial and Indigenous early learning frameworks and related regulations • Daily, structural, system-wide ELCC rules, policies, and regulations

Lifting up the workforce through system change

Transforming and building a high quality ELCC system to improve licensed, centre-based child care necessitates increasing educator qualifications; clarifying specific employment roles, scopes of practice, and competencies; providing meaningful professional learning; and ensuring workplace supports are in place. However, a comprehensive workforce vision must also address several other critical workforce issues that need to be overhauled.

A system that *requires* a highly qualified ELCC workforce:

- Pays educators a decent wage and provides them with benefits and pensions;
- Understands that educators' working conditions are children's learning environments, prioritizes low staff:child ratios, and acknowledges the space, place, and design of early learning settings in the context of the "environment as third teacher";

- Offers paid non-contact time for educators to collaborate, build relationships with colleagues and families, and critically reflect, question, and engage in meaningful professional learning and program planning;
- Ensures job security, decent work schedules, and career advancement;

- Acknowledges that leadership development, mentoring relationships, and communities of practice are critical to educator wellbeing and belonging;
- Prioritizes inclusivity, belonging, and reconciliation and works to dismantle colonialism and intervene to counter bias, racism, and all forms of discrimination;
- Evolves and remains flexible and responsive to communities, families, children, and educators and is informed by current research, best practices, cultural knowledge systems, and lived experiences; and
- Honours and recognizes the diversity of the workforce—members of whom hold a range of skills, knowledge, and values, job titles, and educational qualifications.

Evidence shows that non-profit and public delivery of ELCC programs is essential to developing and sustaining such a system.

Critically, a public system is also best positioned to support the long-term wellbeing, retention, and recruitment of the ELCC workforce through the implementation of strong regulatory measures like educational and professional learning requirements; by providing equitable access to alternative pathways and workplace supports for increasing qualifications; and through collaborating with sector partners to continue to invest in and sustain a highly qualified workforce for years to come.

Importantly, a high-quality ELCC system that supports a highly qualified workforce requires that ELCC be treated as a public good, sufficiently funded by provincial, territorial, and federal governments with public funds, publicly managed, and accountable to the public.

How do we get there?

A roadmap and policy recommendations for moving toward a highly qualified ELCC workforce

To achieve a highly qualified workforce as outlined in the six key employment roles, the following roadmap and policy recommendations are recommended to all levels of government, post-secondary institutions, and service providers across the ELCC sector.

The roadmap is informed by:

- The current context of ELCC workforce qualifications across Canada;
- Research on implementation approaches including setting targets, staging and staggering regulatory changes, and increasing qualifications; and
- Considerations of alternative learning pathways, workplace supports, and meaningful mandatory professional learning.

The roadmap recognizes the unique provincial and territorial policy contexts in this country and makes space for jurisdictional approaches to policy change. It also echoes the call for qualification recognition, access to education, and clarification required on scopes of practice for the workforce noted in the National ELCC Workforce Policy Table's *Wages, benefits and pensions*[51] policy recommendations.

Vision

The National ELCC Workforce Policy Table is proposing that in 10-years' time, 80 – 100% of the workforce will have the following ECE post-secondary qualifications, or equivalent:

- Previously minimally trained or untrained staff will have a one-year diploma, with the goal of phasing this out beyond 10 years;
- ECAs will have a two-year diploma;
- ECEs will have a four-year degree;
- Inclusion Support Specialists/Resource Consultants will have a four-year degree;
- Pedagogical Leaders will have a four-year degree;
- Staff Supervisors will have a four-year degree; and
- Program Directors will have a four-year degree.

At the mid-way point, by year five, 60 – 70% of the workforce will have the following ECE post-secondary qualifications, or equivalent:

- Currently minimally trained and untrained workforce will have a one-year diploma in the role of ECA, significantly reducing the number of untrained staff;
- ECEs will have a two-year diploma;
- Inclusion Support Specialists/Resource Consultants will have a two-year diploma;
- Pedagogical Leaders will have a two-year diploma;
- Staff Supervisors will have a two-year diploma; and
- Program Directors will have a two-year diploma.

Staged and targeted implementation according to specific employment roles is ideal in this order:

- Untrained or minimally trained staff and ECAs (no training moving toward a one-year certificate; one-year certificate moving toward a two-year diploma);
- The removal of regulatory exemptions and director approvals for all staff; and
- ECEs, Staff Supervisors and Program Directors (two-year diploma moving toward a four-year degree).

51 Child Care Now (2024). *Wages, benefits and pensions: Policy recommendations developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table*, p. 12–14

Roadmap and policy recommendations

In order to achieve this vision and its targets, the Policy Table recommends the following steps for implementation.

Ongoing consultation and collaboration

Convene a federal workforce council

Convene a new federal workforce council, similar to the former Child Care Sector Council. With a mandate to advance data collection and research, and to design a national approach to increasing workforce qualifications, the council will work closely with new, provincial, and territorial workforce tables.

Convene provincial and territorial workforce tables

Convene provincial and territorial workforce tables at each jurisdictional level to make decisions, commit to, and implement workforce transformation through increasing qualifications. The membership of the table will include, but not be limited to:

- Staff at provincial/territorial ministries or departments in education, early learning and child care, and in training and advanced education;
- Staff involved in ECE certifications/classification processes (via government, College of Early Childhood Educators (Ontario), or professional associations);
- Post-secondary institutions;
- ECE professional learning and advocacy associations;
- ELCC policy researchers; and
- Service providers or operators.

Engage in sector-wide workforce consultations, including engaging with Indigenous educators, communities, and early learning partners, on increasing qualifications, professional learning, employment roles, and competencies

Focus engagement with the current workforce living and working in rural/urban settings in the following roles:

- ECAs;
- ECEs;
- Inclusion Support Specialists/Resource Consultants;
- Pedagogical Leaders;
- Staff Supervisors;
- Program Directors; and
- Untrained or minimally trained staff.

Incorporate feedback from consultations into policy decision-making, employment roles, scopes of practice, and competencies visioning, and implementation approaches for increasing qualifications.

Concurrent system-building

The following steps should occur in tandem with the phased-in implementation of increased qualification requirements.

As discussed above, overall system change and a significant increase in public funding is required to support educators in reaching higher qualification levels in the short-term and for long-term system sustainability. Our approach prioritizes quality post-secondary education and meaningful professional learning. It operates from a strengths-based, collaborative learning model that acknowledges and values existing work experience and related knowledge, and supports those who are already working to acquire the necessary qualifications.

Develop and implement provincial and territorial wage grids to align with the increase in qualifications and set targets over 10 years

Wage grids should be determined in a formalized process with the sector and based on fair and equitable wage principles as set out in the Wages, Benefits and Pensions: Policy Recommendations developed by the National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table.

Develop and propose regulatory amendments and legislative processes

Aligned with targets and the prioritization of employment roles, make regulatory amendments across all provincial and territorial ELCC legislation. Add additional employment roles with related qualifications and include broad requirements for professional learning to regulatory updates (e.g. Pedagogical Leaders, Inclusion Support Specialists etc.)

Increase availability of ECE diploma and degree programs and increase capacity of post-secondary institutions

Post-secondary ECE programs must be accessible and have capacity to provide quality, specialized programs in alignment with employment roles that are inclusive, culturally relevant, and provide comprehensive hands-on, practical training and current theoretical knowledge. Post-secondary institutions should offer full-time and part-time options and include local, hybrid, rural, and remote program delivery.

Increase funding from provincial governments, post-secondary institutions, and service providers to support staff to increase qualifications and practical experience

Funding would go toward tuition and textbook grants, for educators to receive pay while enrolled in programs and completing placements, modified working schedules, and provision of replacement staff.

Develop workplace training models, mentorship, apprenticeship supports, and additional qualifications (AQs) or micro-credentials in collaboration with post-secondaries, service providers, and professional learning organizations, and the workforce

Recognize professional learning, alternative learning pathways, and years of experience as equivalent to formal educational qualifications in provincial/territorial policy or legislation for those close to retirement during transition to higher minimum qualifications

Align legislative and regulatory amendments on increasing workforce qualifications with sufficient funding to address poor working conditions in ELCC settings

Staff:child ratios to be reduced at both the group-level and centre-level, ensuring that the number of qualified staff at the group level increases.

Provide sufficient funding for all staff to engage in paid non-contact time for program and pedagogical planning, reflection, and communication with staff and families. Provide dedicated professional learning days similar to the number of paid professional learning days that teachers in the public education system receive.

Appendix 1:

Employment roles in licensed centre-based ELCC programs

1. Early Childhood Assistants

Employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies:

- Full-time employment directly in ELCC programs with children (0 – 12 years) and families, staff.
- Demonstrates emerging knowledge and skills focused on collaborative and responsive relationships, ethical care, and early childhood education curriculum and pedagogy.
- Collaborates and works directly with children, families, and staff to create caring, inclusive, and welcoming early learning environments and experiences for all.
- Supports ECEs and assists in daily care and pedagogical practice that is informed by ongoing reflective practice and dialogue focused on:
  - Early learning and developmental theories;
  - Anti-bias, anti-racist, decolonial, gender diverse, and disability approaches and frameworks;
  - Child-led, inquiry and play-based learning approaches; and
  - Provincial, territorial, and Indigenous early learning frameworks and related regulations.
- Co-plans, co-constructs, and documents with children, families, staff, and communities to offer provocations, invitations to play, and inquire, explore, and learn in both indoor and outdoor group learning environments.
- Follows through in initiating, carrying out, and supporting positive and inclusive transitions and personal care routines with children (e.g. indoor/outdoor space transitions, meals, toileting and sleep routines).
- Engages in physically demanding care work.
- Engages in regular non-contact time for program planning, collaboration with staff (ECEs) and families, and meetings with pedagogical leaders and inclusion support/resource consultants.

Educational qualifications:

Short-term vision (one to five years):	**Long-term vision** (five to ten years):
All ECAs have a one-year ECE certificate	All ECAs have a two-year ECE diploma.

Additional training/employment requirements:

- First aid and CPR
- Criminal Reference check and/or vulnerable sector screening

Mandatory professional learning supports and requirements may include:

- Weekly/bi-monthly professional learning time including mentorship, coaching and/or communities of practice.
- Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor (e.g. ECE, pedagogical leader, supervisor etc.)
- Robust support for increasing broad qualifications, such as competency development, additional certifications, diplomas, or degrees, and engaging in formal and informal professional learning including workplace/employer supported education.
- Professional learning focused on, but not limited to:
  - Increasing core ELCC knowledge, skills, and values required for practice (e.g. health and safety, collaborative and responsive relationships, curriculum and pedagogy, professional and ethical decision-making and communication with families and communities etc.);
  - Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning;
  - Strengthening reflective practice knowledge and skills;
  - Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices; and
  - Approaches and practices related to Land / place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development.

2. Early Childhood Educators

Employment roles, scopes of practice, and competencies:

- Full-time employment directly in ELCC programs with children (0 – 12 years) and families, staff.
- Demonstrates expert knowledge, skills, and values focused on collaborative and responsive relationships, ethical care, and early childhood education curriculum and pedagogy.
- Collaborates and works directly with children, families, and staff to create caring, inclusive, and welcoming early learning environments and experiences for all.
- Leads and engages in daily care and pedagogical practice that is informed by ongoing reflective practice and dialogue focused on:
  - Early learning and developmental theories;
  - Anti-bias, anti-racist, decolonial, gender diverse, and disability approaches and frameworks;
  - Child-led, inquiry and play-based learning approaches; and
  - Provincial, territorial, and Indigenous early learning frameworks and related regulations.
- Co-plans, co-constructs, and documents with children, families, staff, and communities to offer provocations, invitations to play, and inquire, explore, and learn in both indoor and outdoor group learning environments.
- Demonstrates leadership in initiating, carrying out, and supporting positive and inclusive transitions and personal care routines with children (e.g. indoor/outdoor space transitions, meals, toileting and sleep routines).
- Engages in physically demanding care work.
- Engages in regular non-contact time for program planning, collaboration with staff (ECAs), and families, and meetings with pedagogical leaders and inclusion support/resource consultants.
- Shares appropriate resources and information with families about community or local supports and collaborates with community organizations and / or school staff
- Provides in-practice support, direction, or coaching or engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentor with other staff (e.g. ECAs) and students when appropriate / needed.

Educational qualifications:

Short-term vision (one to five years):	**Long-term vision** (five to ten years):
All ECEs have a two-year ECE diploma.	All ECEs have a four-year ECE degree.

Additional training/employment requirements:

- First aid and CPR
- Criminal Reference check and/or vulnerable sector screening

Mandatory professional learning supports and requirements may include:

- Weekly/bi-monthly professional learning time including mentorship, coaching, and/or communities of practice.
  - Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor (e.g. pedagogical leaders, inclusion support, director, or staff supervisors etc.)
- Robust support for increasing broad qualifications, such as competency development, additional certifications, diplomas, or degrees, and engaging in formal and informal professional learning including workplace/employer supported education.
- Professional learning focused on, but not limited to:
  - Supervision and mentorship of other staff and student educators;
  - Communication and collaboration with staff, families, and communities;
  - Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning;
  - Deepening reflective practice and pedagogical knowledge and skills;
  - Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices; and
  - Approaches and practices related to Land/place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development.

3. Inclusion Support Specialists/Resource Consultants

Employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies:

- Full-time, flexible employment with partial time in programs and partial time spent on preparation work, developing supports, and professional development/learning. This role may support multiple centres, but is intended to have enough time and capacity to provide individualized support to ELCC staff.
- Collaborates with ECAs and ECEs, and sometimes staff supervisors, to develop support for individual children with disabilities and groups regarding inclusion needs to ensure full participation of all children.
- Collaborates with ECAs, ECEs, families, and other professionals to modify environments, plan activities, and provide support tailored to children's individual and group needs.
- Offers resources and mentors staff on inclusive practices (which includes but is not limited to: anti-bias and anti-racist, decolonial, gender diverse, and disability approaches and frameworks).
- Works with families to understand their child's needs, provide resources, and facilitate smooth transitions between programs.
- Liaises with professionals and organizations/agencies beyond the child care centre (e.g. therapists and other mental/physical health professionals, healthcare providers, government officials, immigration services, etc.) to ensure children and families receive comprehensive support that adequately addresses their needs.

Educational qualifications:

Short-term vision (one to five years):	**Long-term vision** (five to ten years):
All Inclusion Support Specialists/Resource Consultants have a two-year ECE diploma with specialized education in inclusion support through either post-secondary education or through professional development.	All Inclusion Support Specialists/Resource Consultants have a four-year ECE degree.

Additional training/employment requirements:

- First aid and CPR
- Criminal Reference check and/or vulnerable sector screening

Mandatory professional learning support and requirements may include:

- Daily/weekly professional learning time including mentorship, coaching, and/or communities of practice.
  - Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor (e.g. other inclusion support specialists, directors, pedagogical leaders, etc.)
- Robust support for increasing broad qualifications, such as competency development, additional certifications, diplomas or degrees, and engaging in formal and informal professional learning including workplace/employer supported education.
- Professional learning focused on, but not limited to:
  - Inclusive practices, resourcing and resource development;
  - Best practices for supporting children with disabilities and supporting programs to be inclusive for all;
  - Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning;
  - Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices;
  - Approaches and practices related to Land/place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development;
  - Training on the safe use of feeding and mobility devices;
  - Understanding and supporting ECAs and ECEs in co-regulation and self-regulation skills with children;
  - Prevention and reporting practices of child abuse and neglect, and how to support staff through these processes; and
  - The development and implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in program environments.

4. Pedagogical Leaders

Employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies:

- Full-time, flexible employment. The role may support multiple centres with partial time in programs and partial time spent on preparation work, developing supports, and professional development/learning.
- Collaborates with ECAs and ECEs, and sometimes staff supervisors to implement and incorporate early learning frameworks and to support with practice.
- Creates spaces where educators feel empowered to continuously provide learning opportunities, provocations, and invitations for children.
- Encourages educators to critically examine, reflect, and question their practice, engage in ongoing professional learning, and modify and experiment based on evidence, reflection, and the principles of relational, ethical care and complex, situated practice.
- Views the early years/child care program with a broad lens, considering and analyzing the ways in which systems and communities have impact and what aspects are worth incorporating or challenging.
- Encourages and creates opportunities for ECAs and ECEs to ask questions, engage thoughtfully, try new approaches and implement ideas, and challenge existing practices, both individually and collectively.
- Develops and creates opportunities to share resources, research, and ideas with ECAs and ECEs to support their learning, professional development, and practice.
- Ensures programs account for children's holistic development.
- Connects pedagogical theories and thinking with the practice realities of ELCC settings, ensuring alignment between the program's vision and its implementation.
- Fosters strong partnerships between educators, families, and communities.

Educational qualifications:

Short-term vision (one to five years):	**Long-term vision** (five to ten years):
All Pedagogical Leaders have a two-year ECE diploma with specialized education through either post-secondary education or through professional development in early years pedagogy.	All Pedagogical Leaders have a four-year ECE degree.

Additional training/employment requirements:

- First aid and CPR
- Criminal Reference check and/or vulnerable sector screening

Mandatory professional learning support and requirements may include:

- Daily/weekly professional learning time including mentorship, coaching, and/or communities of practice.
  - Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentor or mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor/mentee
- Robust support for increasing broad qualifications, such as competency development, additional certifications, diplomas, or degrees, and engaging in formal and informal professional learning including workplace/employer supported education.
- Professional learning focused on, but not limited to:
  - Current research and theory related to early learning pedagogy and pedagogue/pedagogist practice;
  - Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning;
  - Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices;
  - Approaches and practices related to Land/place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development;
  - Deep understanding of the different areas of development, including social-emotional, cognitive, physical, and language and how to support educators in holistically supporting all areas;
  - Understanding and implementation of different modes of accessible engagement;
  - Supporting educators in viewing children as competent, valuable, and knowledgeable community members and how to effectively engage them in learning processes;
  - Supporting educators in engaging families and communities in their teaching and learning practices;
  - Feedback and program assessment practices and how to support educators in evaluating, documenting, and narrating their practice through metacognition and reflection; and
  - Critical and reflective practice methodology.

5. Staff Supervisors

Employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies:

- Full-time employment directly in ELCC programs with children (0 – 12 years) and families, staff.
- Demonstrates expert knowledge, skills, and values focused on collaborative and responsive relationships, ethical care, and early childhood education curriculum and pedagogy.
- Collaborates and works directly with children, families, and staff to create caring, inclusive, and welcoming early learning environments and experiences for all.
- Demonstrates leadership, problem-solving, conflict resolution skills, and expertise in the administration and human resources of supervising and supporting all staff in ELCC programs.
- Administrative tasks that include maintaining records and collaborating and communicating regularly with Program Directors on the daily and long-term operational needs and oversight for all jurisdictional compliance requirements of ELCC programs.
- Excellent communication, active listening, and collaboration skills demonstrated in regular family meetings and with local community outreach/collaborations.
- Liaises, supports, and offers resources and provides leadership to all staff on ELCC care and pedagogical and reflective practice and programing.
- Supports and ensures staff are provided with regular non-contact time for program planning, collaboration with staff and families, and meetings with pedagogical leaders and inclusion support/resource consultants.
- Provides in-practice support, direction, or coaching or engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentor with other staff and students when appropriate/needed.

Educational qualifications include:

Short-term vision (one to five years):	**Long-term vision** (five to ten years):
All Staff Supervisors have a two-year ECE diploma.	All Staff Supervisors have a four-year ECE degree.

Additional training/employment requirements:

- First aid and CPR
- Criminal Reference check and/or vulnerable sector screening

Mandatory professional learning support and requirements may include:

- Weekly/bi-monthly professional learning time including mentorship, coaching, and/or communities of practice.
    - Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor (e.g. other staff supervisors, directors, pedagogical leaders, inclusion supports etc.)
- Robust support for increasing broad qualifications, such as competency development, additional certifications, diplomas, or degrees, and engaging in formal and informal professional learning including workplace/employer supported education.
- Professional learning focused on, but not limited to:
    - Increasing knowledge and skills in supervision and mentorship of all staff and the onboarding of new staff and students;
    - Strengthening administration, human resources, and leadership skills;
    - Strengthening reflective practice, communication, and collaboration skills with staff, families and communities;
    - Deepening all ELCC related knowledge, skills, and values relevant to provincial territorial, and Indigenous early learning frameworks and related regulations;
    - Increasing knowledge and skills on daily, structural, system-wide ELCC rules, policies, regulations, and monitoring and accountability processes for ongoing operations of ELCC environments;
    - Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning;
    - Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices; and
    - Approaches and practices related to Land/place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development.

6. Program Directors

Employment roles, scope of practice, and competencies:

- Full-time employment with at least two to three days being on-site.
- Responsible for the overall management and operation of a child care centre. This includes: supporting the Staff Supervisor in managing staff; supporting the Pedagogical Leaders, Inclusive Supports/Resource Consultants, and ECA/ECE staff in developing programs; handling finances; and maintaining facilities.
- Supporting the Staff Supervisor in hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating child care staff.
- Supporting the Pedagogical Leaders, Inclusive Supports/Resource Consultants, and ECA/ECE staff in developing programs that meet municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal standards.
- Maintaining required licensing and compliance requirements.
- Developing and managing budgets, handling finances, and ensuring the centre's financial health (this would include leading board meetings in a non-profit centre).
- Oversees strategic planning, risk management, and stakeholder relations.
- Ensuring the facility is safe, clean, and well-maintained in compliance with relevant health & safety policies, procedures, and legislation.
- Establishing and enforcing policies and procedures for the centre.
- Has an integral role in supporting children, parents, families, and the broader community by ensuring a safe, welcoming, and inclusive child care environment.

Educational qualifications:

Short-term vision (one to five years):	**Long-term vision** (five to ten years):
All Program Directors have a two-year ECE diploma with specialized education, through either post-secondary education or professional development, in leadership and management.	All Program Directors have a four-year ECE degree with a post-diploma or certificate in leadership and management.

Additional training/employment requirements:

- First aid and CPR
- Criminal Reference check and/or vulnerable sector screening

Mandatory professional learning support and requirements may include:

- Weekly/monthly professional learning time including mentorship, coaching and/or communities of practice.
  - Engages in a mentoring relationship as a mentor or mentee with appropriate on-site/off-site mentor/mentee.
- Robust support for increasing broad qualifications, such as competency development, additional certifications, diplomas, or degrees, and engaging in formal and informal professional learning including workplace/employer supported education.
- Professional learning focused on, but not limited to:
  - Increasing knowledge and skills in leadership, supervision, and mentorship of all staff and the onboarding of new staff and students;
  - Deepening all ELCC related knowledge, skills, and values relevant to provincial territorial, and Indigenous early learning frameworks and related regulations;
  - Increasing knowledge and skills on daily, structural, system-wide ELCC rules, policies, regulations, and monitoring and accountability processes for ongoing operations of ELCC environments; and
  - Approaches and practices related to play-based, inquiry-based, and child-led learning.
- Learning related to local, community, and cultural contexts including inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-bias/anti-racist approaches and practices.
- Approaches and practices related to Land/place-based learning, experiential learning, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and curriculum development.
- Knowledge of business finance tailored to the model of operation for the child care centre/organization.
- Financial, managerial, and cost accounting, which includes but is not limited to asset management, expense and income tracking and reporting, taxation, and auditing processes.
- Strengthening policy and procedure development and writing skills.
- Developing strong communication skills to support developing relationships with staff, families, and community.

Appendix 2:

Summary of workforce consultations on increasing qualifications

Introduction

In January and February 2026, Child Care Now and the Educators Matter project team planned and facilitated virtual group discussions across Canada with the early learning and child care (ELCC) workforce on the topic of qualifications.

The consultation questions and design were informed by the draft version of *A Vision and Roadmap for Increasing Educator Qualifications in Licensed, Centre-Based Child Care: Supporting a Highly Qualified Early Learning and Child Care Workforce in Canada*. The National Early Learning and Child Care Workforce Policy Table and the Project Advisory Committee identified the consultation as an important step in the development of a roadmap and policy recommendations for increasing the qualifications of the workforce.

The discussion design was also guided by conversations with provincial and territorial associations, as well as workforce researchers and advocates from different provinces/territories.

Between mid-January and mid-February 2026, 16 small focus group discussions were held over Zoom, each 90 minutes. Sixty-eight early childhood educators (ECEs) and other staff in a range of roles (e.g. assistants, supervisors, directors) with a range of educational qualifications (e.g. course work, two-year diploma, degree, graduate degree) from seven provinces and one territory participated.

The Educators Matter project team is grateful to the 68 participants for their insight and feedback. While we recognize that they cannot be considered representative of the national workforce of over 300,000 people, they provided important insight. The discussions, along with feedback raised at the October 2025 National Symposium on the Workforce, informed revisions to the paper. In particular, these conversations reinforced the importance of system-building and public funding for improving educator wages and working conditions when increasing qualifications.

To support open and honest discussion, three consultation groupings were planned for each province/territory:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Minimally, untrained, or unqualified members of the workforce typically with some course training in ECE who are in assistant roles	ECEs of varying levels across jurisdictions typically with a two-year diploma in ECE (some with a one-year certificate) in ECE roles	ECEs of varying levels across jurisdictions typically with a two-year diploma in ECE (some with a one-year certificate) in supervisory or director roles

The participants were asked the following six questions and shown abbreviated charts and content from *A vision and roadmap for increasing educator qualifications in licensed child care centres*.

1. Are you satisfied with your level of educational qualifications relative to the requirements and demands of your position?
2. What would be the impact if those you work with had higher levels of educational qualifications?
3. Please take a look at the employment roles chart on the next slide
   a. Do you agree that these distinct and varying roles should be in a child care room and in the centre?
   b. What, if anything, would you change, add or remove?
4. Please take a look at the roles and qualifications on the chart on the next slide
   a. Do you agree with the educational qualifications and the 10-year plan listed for each role?
   b. What, if anything, would you change, add or remove?
5. What, if any, concerns or anxieties do you have about increasing qualifications and these suggested approaches?
6. What strategies or approaches would you recommend to increase the qualifications of the workforce over time?

Key themes

Despite regional and workforce grouping nuances, several repeating themes are evident across all groups and jurisdictions:

1. Work experience is highly valued.

- Work experience, commitment, and passion is of equal value to formal educational qualifications.

2. Ongoing professional learning and increasing knowledge, skills, and competencies are highly valued.

- Initial educational qualifications are sufficient for entry into the profession, but ongoing professional learning is required to carry out responsibilities long-term.
- Leadership, mentorship, human resources, and financial and inclusion support knowledge and skills are critically lacking in current ECE educational qualifications.

3. Quality, access, and capacity of post-secondary ECE programs require improvement.

- Post-secondary ECE programs must be accessible and have capacity to provide quality, specialized programs in alignment with employment roles that are inclusive, culturally relevant, and provide comprehensive hands-on, practical training and current theoretical knowledge.
- It is challenging to imagine higher qualification standards and degree programs until current concerns about post-secondary capacity are resolved.

4. Vision for increasing qualifications is ideal but unrealistic in current policy context.

- Ten-year plan is ideal but unrealistic without addressing financial, accessibility, and time barriers, as well as considering an overhaul of ECE post-secondary programs to ensure quality practical training.

5. **Funding, time, and accessibility are major barriers to implementation.**
    - Cost, time, and access to post-secondary education are significant concerns, including tuition costs, funding required for replacement staff, and time off for staff to pursue education.
6. **Wage grids, decent working conditions, and benefits are needed prior to implementation for educators new to the profession and for those in later stages of their career, including approaching retirement.**
    - Currently, there is a lack of motivation and external incentives for educators to pursue further qualifications.
7. **There is strong interest in recognition and implementation of alternative learning pathways to meet qualification requirements.**
    - Mentorship, apprenticeship, workplace/employer programs, or vocational qualifications, and formal recognition of years of experience and professional learning are key implementation approaches for meeting proposed qualification targets.

Feedback beyond key themes

There was some additional feedback that either elaborates on the key themes identified or directly challenges aspects of the paper, which we feel is important to share:

Concern about educational qualifications

The majority of consultation participants were generally satisfied with their own and their colleagues' educational qualifications; however, there was strong agreement amongst Group 2 participants (and some Group 3 participants) that no staff member should be without education or be employed for years with only minimum course-based hours of education. Many Group 2 participants raised concerns about the burden placed on ECEs to support staff with less formal education and training, which includes students on placement and staff who are in the earlier stages of their learning.

Most participants in Group 2 and Group 3 acknowledged gaps in their own education and frequently cited a need for leadership and mentorship training, health and safety, and/or for specific skills in inclusion supports or human resources.

In all groups, participants noted that all educators should be engaged in ongoing professional learning and be motivated by a commitment to and passion for the work. The majority of participants placed equal value on educational qualifications as they did on work experience.

Implementation of employment roles

Participants of all groups agreed with the distinct and varying employment roles, especially that of the Inclusion Support Specialist and Pedagogical Leader. Some noted that nutritionists, cooks, or health and safety roles should also be included and clearly outlined.

While there were no recommendations to explicitly remove the degree requirements for roles from the 10-year plan, participants were generally hesitant about this requirement and some questioned if the degree was necessary, prioritizing experiential learning over academic and theoretical learning. One participant in a Group 2 noted that, "Until we are financially compensated, we won't do a degree."

Appendix 3:

Glossary of terms

The language used related to early learning and child care (ELCC) workforce qualifications varies across provinces and territories. The following list and accompanying definitions are intended to clarify the use of terms in this document.

The terms are largely informed by the *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2021*, the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council's *Occupational Standards Child Care Human Resources Sector Council for Early Childhood Educators, 2010*, the Policy Table's recommendations on wages, benefits and pensions, and the international research on implementation approaches referenced in this document.

Accreditation / approved educational equivalency

Generally, "accreditation" or "approved educational equivalency," refers to the process by which a person is recognized for meeting an Early Childhood Education (ECE)-related educational qualification with a non-ECE-related educational qualification. In this document, approved educational equivalency also refers to the recognition of professional learning, alternative pathways, additional qualifications (AQs), certificates, and/or micro-credentials.

Additional qualifications (AQs)

"Additional qualifications" refers to a form of professional learning and a certification designed to improve knowledge and skills in specialized areas of practice. This is typically used in reference to additional courses available to certified teachers in the formal education system in Canada.

Alternative pathways

"Alternative pathways" refers to varying and informal ways of acquiring qualifications. This can include pathways into the profession (moving from untrained to trained) that are not reliant on pre-service training or formal educational qualifications such as apprenticeship and mentorship programs, collaborative workplace training models, and professional learning.

Bridging

"Bridging" refers to the opportunity to take additional courses/complete other accreditation to qualify for a diploma/degree in an ECE program. This allows individuals who have already completed some relevant training/education, work experience, or combination of both to advance their education and work opportunities. Bridging is common in post-secondary ECE departments and programs in Canada.

Certification / certification levels

In some provinces and territories "certification" is used to describe the legislative requirements of the workforce to work in regulated child care. Some provinces (e.g. Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island) require staff to be certified to work in ELCC and then classified according to working environment and age groups.

Certification levels are determined by the educational qualification (or credential) of the staff (e.g. Level Two) but also include a trainee level, assistant or level one, which often only requires the completion of an orientation course or registration in an approved post-secondary program.

Certification may also refer to a course or training received in addition to receiving an educational qualification or a credential. For example, the workforce is required to have CPR and First Aid certification.

Certified

"Certified" is the term used for those who have undergone the certification process with either the provincial/territorial authority or association to enable a person to work in licensed, regulated child care as either classified or categorized according to levels.

Classification

The term "classification" is often used in two ways in provinces and territories:

1. Under the umbrella of the certification process, classification specifically enables staff to work in particular ELCC settings and age groups (e.g. Prince Edward Island – Preschool classification). In these cases, staff are both certified and hold a classification.
2. Similar to the definition of certification and certification levels, classification refers to the requirements of the workforce to work in regulated child care (e.g. Manitoba) determined by the educational qualification (or credential) acquired (e.g. ECE I, II, III in Manitoba). Classification defined in this way also accounts for staff with minimal training, such as an orientation course (e.g. Child Care Assistant in Manitoba).

Credential

Despite some provincial and territorial variation with the term "credential," in this document, it is used to refer to an educational qualification, such as a certificate, diploma, or degree. Used interchangeably with educational qualification.

Employment role

The term "employment role" refers to the specific position an employee holds within an organization. It defines the responsibilities and tasks, the scope of practice, required skills and competencies, and expected performance standards for that particular position.

Educational qualification

"Educational qualification" refers to a qualification acquired through a post-secondary training institution which results in a certificate, diploma, or degree. This is used interchangeably with credential.

Increasing qualifications

The phrase "increasing qualifications" refers to increasing ECE-related educational training including acquiring a certificate, diploma, or degree. Related to the umbrella term, "qualifications," increasing qualifications may also refer to adding to or supplementing existing skills and knowledge through alternate means such as professional learning.

Micro-credentials

"Micro-credential" refers to a short, focused certification that validates or enhances a specific skill or competency. This could be used to support increasing qualifications. They are typically earned through completing short courses or training modules and can be done in collaboration with post-secondary institutions and professional learning organizations.

Professional learning

The term "professional learning" refers to the opportunities educators and care professionals can participate in to enhance their skills, develop strategies, and learn practices from experts. Professional learning can happen in different ways, including in-person sessions, online workshops, independent research/study, etc.

Registered

The term "registered" is unique to Ontario, whereby a person who has the educational qualification or credential (i.e. ECE diploma) registers with the regulatory college, the College of Early Childhood Educators, and is permitted to use the legislatively protected title, Early Childhood Educator or Registered Early Childhood Educator. Only those with the ECE diploma or degree are registered.

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