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National study highlights the link between employee workload and quality of practice in ECE

A [national survey](#) recently conducted by the University of Sydney confirms the feedback provided by IEU members working in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

The findings clearly demonstrate the inevitable impacts of unsustainable workloads and excessive documentation on the core work of ECE teachers and assistants. Against the backdrop of horrifying failures to ensure child safety in the sector, the issue of diversion from critical time spent interacting with children is of great concern.

The research found that ECE staff spend less than a third of their day in focused, uninterrupted time with children in their care. Two thirds of survey respondents reported that workload demands consume time that would otherwise be spent in meaningful interactions with children.

The study identified factors that have been raised by IEU members and pursued by the IEU in advocacy with federal bodies, including:

- contact and non-contact workloads that are unsustainable;
- unpaid work hours undertaken to cope with excessive documentation;
- distractions and interruptions that negatively impact teacher capacity to be fully present in their interactions with children; and
- the need for a review of the National Assessment and Ratings system to evaluate detrimental effects on dedicated contact time for early childhood teachers.

When combined with other factors such as low wages, inadequate access to professional development and insufficient support for children with high learning and support needs, it is clear that prompt and far-reaching change in the sector is essential.

A collaboration to address workload issues

In 2024 the IEU approached the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to clarify the documentation requirements necessary to comply with the Assessment and Ratings process, a known driver of work intensification. The result of that engagement was a collaboration between ACECQA and our union on a set of [four fact sheets](#) that provide specific advice to ECE workers and providers in both school age care and early childhood. The Educational Program Documentation Information Sheets confirm the evidence requirements necessary to satisfy the Assessment and Ratings process, without producing excessive or duplicative documentation.

Ongoing advocacy

The IEU will continue to advocate for positive changes in the ECE sector that allow teachers and assistants to focus on their core work and ensure both child safety and high-quality early childhood education.