



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE WORKING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Advisory Group was established in November 2020 to work with the NSW Department of Education to co-design an Aboriginal ECE strategy. [First Steps Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy](#) was launched in June 2021 and requires ongoing oversight and governance for its implementation. This approach to establish a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Working Group aligns to Closing the Gap Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making where in the Early Education and Care Directorates we are committed to sharing decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations; Priority Reform 3: Transforming Government Organisations where in the Early Education and Care Directorates we are committed to systemic and structural transformation to improve accountability, and to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities as well as the Community Controlled Sector.

Purpose and role

The purpose of this working group is to oversee, co-design, inform decisions and guide the work of the [First Steps Early Childhood Education Strategy](#) and other key initiatives that the Department has responsibility for in Early Childhood Education and Care, including oversight of the implementation of the ECE Reform Strategy.

The role the group includes but is not limited to:

- Responding to requests for input, feedback, and endorsement.
- Guiding the broader implementation of the [First Steps Early Childhood Education Strategy](#).
- Co-designing pieces of policy and program work that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
- Informing decision making as requested.
- Engaging, distributing information, and/or consulting your community/organisation as requested.



Principles

Underpinning the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood and Care Working Group are five key principles:

- **Cultural respect** – recognising, respecting, valuing and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cultures with cultural humility and respect.
- **Justice and Equity** – fostering justice and equity through fair process, transparent decision making and valuing all voices.
- **Leadership and accountability** – demonstrating and fostering leadership and accountability to community, ECEC sector on the implementation of the [First Steps Early Childhood Education Strategy](#).
- **Respectful engagement and strong partnerships** – sustained, respectful and inclusive engagement and partnerships.
- **Culturally responsive system and services** –centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the design, delivery and evaluation of policy, programs and services relating to Early Education and Care.

Specific Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide expert advice on all ECEC matters inclusive of ECEC policy and funding reforms, Brighter Beginnings, NQF, regulation of the ECEC, and universal pre-kindergarten) • Respond to requests for input, feedback, and endorsement • Guide the broader implementation of the First Steps Strategy • Co-design pieces of policy and program work that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities • Inform decision making as requested • Engage, distribute information, and/or consult your community/organisation as requested • Adhere to the Terms of Reference • Adhere to the Confidentiality Agreement
Chairperson (Department of Education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Deputy Secretary Education and Skills Reform or Senior First Nations ECE Departmental Staff • Manages the agenda • Manages the progress of the meeting • Ensures meetings are effective and discussion is open and constructive



<p>Co-Chairperson (Member of AG)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates with other advisory group members • Conduit between other members and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities • Promotes ECEC and work the Department is doing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • Attends broader strategic stakeholder group meetings that follow the working group meetings • Reports matters of significance from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC Working Group for consideration to broader strategic stakeholder groups • Report any matters of significance for consideration from broader strategic stakeholder groups to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECE Working Group. • Co drafts the annual evaluation report with the secretariat.
<p>Secretariat (Department to provide)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafts and provides agendas and reading materials before the scheduled meeting • Keeps note of discussions, decisions and actions • Maintains official file, and action record • Records and distributes minutes • Support delivery of an annual evaluation report • Track group participation and attendance

Membership

Co-Chair: The meeting will be chaired by the elected Working Group Co-Chair and Departmental staff member unless delegated to another member. The duration will be changed at the end of a twelve months term. The co-chair is elected through a democratic process at the first working group meeting of the financial year.

Members: Members are representative of the ECEC sector and associated partners. Partner members have standing membership. Non-partner membership is selected through a competitive EOI process. Membership is evaluated annually.

Meetings

Format: It is recommended that meetings will be conducted in person where possible. There is also the option of participating via online zoom for members at all Working Group meetings. Participation details will be included on all agendas distributed. Working Group members should indicate if they will be attending via zoom or in person when accepting a calendar invitation.



Frequency: Meetings will be held every six weeks with every second meeting held in person. Additional meetings may be scheduled as agreed by the members of the Working Group.

Input out of session may be sought if needed, however would be kept to a minimum.

Decision Making: In line with cultural governance principles decision making will be fostered via consensus, however should consensus not be reached in a reasonable time or manner, the matter should be brought forward to all members and voted on by majority rule. In the unlikely event the vote be hung between members, the current co-chair vote counts as two.

Acknowledgment of Country: Each Working Group meeting will open with a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country and Traditional Owners.

Quorum: The quorum for the Working Group will defined as half of its membership plus one (including proxies). In the absence of a quorum the meeting may continue at the discretion of the Chair.

Agenda papers: Agenda items may be submitted by any committee member. Agenda items, together with discussion papers shall be submitted to the Secretariat not less than 10 business days prior to the date of the meeting. Additional agenda items may be accepted outside this timeframe with approval of the Chair. Agendas and relevant papers will be circulated by the Secretariat at least 5 working days prior to the date of the meeting.

Minutes: Minutes will be drafted by the Secretariat as on or within 7 working days following meetings. The minutes will be provided to all members via email. Requested changes to the minutes are to be in writing to the secretariat no more than 7 days after receipt.

Guests: Guests may be invited to attend the meeting to contribute information to specific agenda items. Proposed guests will be captured in the agenda ahead of meeting dates.

Proxies: Working Group members commit to attending as many meetings as possible, however, to ensure a quorum is achieved, where a Working Group member is unable to attend a meeting, they are encouraged to send a proxy. The proxy should be fully briefed prior to the meetings and have delegation to actively contribute to discussions and decisions.

Confidentiality: Members of the Working Group may from time to time be in receipt of information that is regarded as culturally sensitive, confidential or have privacy implications. Members acknowledge their responsibility to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all information that is not in the public domain. Members are required to sign a Confidentiality agreement. Members will be provided with a summary of points that can be shared amongst their networks if or when requested.

Conflicts: It is expected that members will declare any actual or perceived conflicts of interest on any business as it arises with the chair.



Evaluation: An evaluation report is expected to be delivered at the end of each financial year on the scope of activity performed by the working group, number of in session and out of session events with time captured, key decision making and any recommendations for changes of the working group membership or terms of reference. The responsibility of the report is with the co-chair and secretariat.

Update: The Terms of Reference for this working group is expected to be reviewed by the group and updated annually.