

Deloitte Access Economics

# Review of the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection

Australian Government  
Department of Education

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# Acronyms

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DAE	Deloitte Access Economics
ECDSG	Early Childhood Data Sub Group
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC NMDS	Early Education and Care National Minimum Dataset
LDC	Long day care
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NIA	National Information Agreement
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)
NP	National Partnership
NPDC	National Perinatal Data Collection
NP ECEC	National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PC	Productivity Commission
ROGS	Report
SA2	Statistical Area Level 2
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index for Areas
UA	Universal Access
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YBFS	Year before full-time schooling

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# Executive Summary

In late 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (NP ECE), which committed the Australian Government and all State and Territory governments to achieving universal access to preschool by 2013<sup>1</sup>. More specifically, the universal access commitment was designed to ensure that by 2013, each child would have access to a preschool program that is delivered:

- In the 12 months prior to full-time schooling;
- By a four-year university-qualified early childhood teacher;
- For 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year;
- In a form that meets the needs of parents; and
- At a cost that does not present a barrier to participation<sup>2</sup>.

The National Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Collection ('the Collection') is an annual collection, developed as part of the National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care (NIA ECEC).

The NIA ECEC aims to increase the ability to collect and provide quality, comparable and reliable ECEC data, which will enable development of an evidence base for assessing outcomes and informing future policy developments in this area. The activities covered by the NIA ECEC are intended to build a common, shared infrastructure to ensure nationally consistent ECEC data across jurisdictions. The agreement was developed in consultation with the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and key data agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)<sup>3</sup>.

The Collection itself, underpinned by the Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set (ECEC NMDS), has been compiled and published by the ABS since 2010, based on data provided by individual States and Territories and the Australian Government Department of Education.

In 2014, the former Australian Government Department of Education contracted Deloitte Access Economics to conduct a review of the Collection<sup>4</sup>. The review was based on consultations with a number of key stakeholders. These consultations were structured

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<sup>1</sup> National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (NP ECE).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> As a result of Machinery of Government changes announced in later 2014, a new Australian Government Department of Education and Training has been formed. Responsibility for preschool programmes, including Universal Access and the National Collection will sit with the newly formed Department of Education and Training. Responsibility for child care policy and programmes and co-ordination of early childhood development policy has passed to the Department of Social Services. This report generally refers to the former Department of Education.

around a number of key evaluation themes, including the **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability** of the Collection. The discussions with stakeholders were semi-structured, and guided by a set of questions which were amended slightly depending on the role of the stakeholder in the Collection. A full list of stakeholders consulted can be found in Section 2.2, while a list of consultation questions is shown in Appendix A.

The findings from these consultations have been summarised in this report, and a small number of key recommendations have been drawn from these findings. Unless otherwise specified, contributions to these discussions have been reported confidentially.

## Key findings

Several key findings emerged from the consultation process, including:

- The current policy work in the early childhood education space, particularly as it relates to the current Productivity Commission review, is an opportune time to step back and re-evaluate/re-confirm both the **purpose of the Collection**, and **what is being measured**. In particular, the scope of the Collection – which was previously framed within the context of the NP Agreement, could be re-designed to ensure its capability to answer important high level research and policy questions.
- On a related note, there are significant concerns on behalf of some stakeholders that the Collection as it currently stands is solely occupied by **monitoring the policy in place, rather than having the capacity to inform future policy direction and improvements**. However, even in its capacity to monitor current policy, robust program evaluation is limited by access to unit record level data which is not available to researchers outside the ABS.
- The Collection itself is also complicated by the fact that attending pre-school education is not compulsory, however the aim of the National Partnership is to provide Universal Access. Although this is primarily a policy issue, it is also a key complicating factor in data collection.
- Any loss in momentum for the Collection, particularly due to a discontinuation or under-allocation of funding, would put the value and effectiveness of the Collection at risk. It is also likely to reduce the capacity and willingness of stakeholders to remain engaged in the process, and would potentially result in a significant deterioration in quality in any future Collections. However, in its current form, without an ongoing requirement to inform Performance Indicators the utility of the Collection would be significantly reduced as it cannot adequately serve a wider research and evaluation purpose with its current issues. More generally, there is **strong support for retaining a Collection; however it does not necessarily have to be the Collection in its current form**.
- The Australian Government is continuing to fund the National Collection and previously funding had been available to the jurisdictions over several years in order to assist with data enhancement and other improvement activities. In order to continue improvements however, many States and Territories have noted a need for some level of ongoing funding from the Australian Government, as they do not have the capacity or resources to fund the ongoing collection and provision of this data to the ABS for a national collection. In addition, as a user-funded collection, the ABS would be

significantly limited in its ability to produce the collection in any form, and the publication would likely cease.

- From a broader policy perspective, the main focus of the collection is to determine performance under the NP. As such, the Australian Government's investment into the Collection reflects the condition of the Universal Access (UA) agreement that the Collection must be able to measure whether or not the relevant objectives have been achieved. However, if the Collection were to move beyond this purpose – including to a standalone Collection – an ongoing source (or sources) of funding would need to be identified. This may be in the form of co-funding through both the Australian Government and State and Territory governments. Given the large amount of funding distributed by Governments to the ECEC sector, it would be expected that any funding of a Collection to measure and monitor policy performance would represent a small proportion of the overall investment into the sector.
- Although national comparability is of key importance, and was one of the fundamental drivers of the establishment of the Collection, it is also difficult to achieve given the different service delivery models and different collection methodologies operating in the States and Territories. However, the NMDS and the funding allocated for process improvements appears to have gone some way to improving comparability, as evidenced by the removal of the 'Experimental' classification of the relevant publication by the ABS.
- There are key issues to be learned from the health sector, which has addressed many of the issues currently impeding research in early education, such as data integration, confidentiality, and the importance of data collection at the administrative/operational level.
- There was general consensus from all stakeholders that the Collection should remain an administrative data-based collection. Despite some discussion of a survey methodology, this was not considered as a viable alternative given the key requirement for unit record level information, including counts of children participating in preschool programs for performance measurement. However surveys (particularly those conducted on a less than annual basis), were believed by some stakeholders to impose a lower respondent burden.

## Recommendations

The table below summarises the key recommendations from Deloitte Access Economics to the Australian Government Department of Education in relation to various aspects of the Collection. The context of these recommendations can be found in Section 3.

Deloitte Access Economics notes that these recommendations are solely based on consultation sessions with the listed stakeholders, and may not represent an exhaustive list of recommendations in relation to the Collection. Some of these recommendations may also have already been adopted, however may not have been recognised or communicated with key stakeholders. In this instance, the communication of outcomes of the recommendation should replace the recommendation itself.

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## Recommendation

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### Relevance

- 1.1 Move towards the development of the Collection as a standalone data source for the ECEC sector, which has strong links to the Performance Indicators (and ensures that key indicators can be monitored), but is not solely driven by their design.
- 1.2 Continue to exercise caution when undertaking any national comparisons, including attaching caveats and footnotes where appropriate.

### Effectiveness

- 2.1 Provide greater transparency to State and Territory stakeholders regarding the imputation methodology used for the CCMS component of the Collection, including potential access to the data prior to provision to the ABS (noting this is currently underway through ECDSG).
- 2.2 Continue the use of the reference week model, however exercise caution when extrapolating relevant data items (e.g. attendance) over the full year.
- 2.3 Continue to ensure that governance arrangements are clear and well documented, including responsibilities for decisions and their communication to key stakeholders, primarily through ECDSG.

### Efficiency

- 3.1 Retain the Collection as an annual data collection.
- 3.2 Retain the census format of data collection (as opposed to a smaller survey-based model) in order to maximise the use of administrative provider data and potential for future linkage with other datasets that are built on unit record level information.
- 3.3 Encourage continued efficiency improvements in systems and processes through forums such as an annual workshop between State and Territory representatives that focuses on sharing learnings, identifying best practice and moving towards the harmonisation of collection methodologies.

### Impact

- 4.1 The Collection, even in its current form, should not be ceased until an alternate nationally comparable dataset on early childhood education and care is developed.

### Sustainability

- 5.1 Ensure funding commitments are over an adequate time period (i.e. several years) to encourage investments in improving systems and process, develop a longer-term strategic vision in relation to early childhood education research, and maintain the engagement of the States and Territories.
- 5.2 Ownership of the data should be clearly identified, with the owner of the data having sufficient capacity to influence and improve key issues with the current Collection, including funding and access.
- 5.3 A roadmap towards access at the unit record level should be developed by the data owner, which sets out clear processes and protocols for stakeholders to follow in order to allow users to conduct more robust research and policy analysis.

### Other – future reviews

- 6.1 Given the critical role service providers play in the data facilitation process, a review of the National Collection from this stakeholder group should be considered.
  - 6.2 Where possible, State and Territory representatives and other key stakeholders should be consulted prior to the issuing of a terms of reference for future reviews of the Collection.
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# 1 Background

The National ECEC Collection (the Collection) is a child level census of children enrolled in preschool in Australia. It covers government and non-government preschools and preschool delivered in Long Day Care settings.

Data on early childhood education in Australia has historically lacked national comparability. Key issues affecting the comparability and quality of the data include lack of consistency in concepts, methods and definitions, scope and coverage, and reporting periods. As a result of these issues with data on participation in ECEC, the Collection was created to measure the performance of State and Territory Governments in reaching performance targets agreed under the National Partnership Agreements (NP Agreements) on Early Childhood Education.

Data from the Collection has also been used for a number of other purposes, namely to provide information for reporting on:

- Australian Government funded Indigenous and remote early childhood policies;
- Progress towards Closing the Gap targets on Indigenous Early Childhood Education;
- Enrolments for the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (RoGS) and Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage; and
- Participation for international reporting to the OECD and UNESCO.

The Collection is one of the outputs supported under a National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care (NIA ECEC) between State and Territory Governments and the Australian Government. The NIA ECEC was put in place to ensure that early gains were made to improve the capacity to measure performance information requirements for the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (NP ECE) and other relevant Agreements under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Collection has been undertaken annually from 2010, and has been compiled and published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) since 2010 under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements with the Australian Government Department of Education.

The Collection is underpinned by standards specified within the Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set (ECEC NMDS). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has produced the ECEC NMDS with annual amendments since 2010 under MOU arrangements with the Australian Government Department of Education.

Data standards and collection instructions for the National ECEC Collection are also outlined in detail within the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection: Data Collection Guide, 2013.

State governments have been funded by the Australian Government to provide access to preschool under two successive NP Agreements worth a total of nearly \$1.7 billion, dating from 2008-09 to 2014. An extension has now been agreed for 2015.

Future decisions on early learning, including the Australian Government's involvement in preschool beyond 2015, will be made by the Government following consideration of the report on the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Childcare and Early Learning. The Federation White Paper process is also an important factor.

The first two years of the Collection were labelled as Experimental Estimates due to data quality and coverage issues. There are still some jurisdictions that are not able to meet all of the standards set out in the ECEC NMDS, however there has been substantial improvement by data providers to meet those standards. In 2012 the ABS determined the Collection no longer warranted the label of 'Experimental Estimates' due to the improvements in:

- the increase of the coverage of the collection;
- an alignment of collection reference periods for all jurisdictions; and
- increased alignment with the standards specified in the ECEC NMDS.

There has also been significant improvement in the quality of the statistical linkage variable, which has allowed for the improvement of identification of both child counts, and the year before full-time schooling (YBFS) counts.

The Collection is primarily managed through the Early Childhood Data Subgroup (ECDSG), which is made up of key stakeholders, including the Australian Government Department of Education, States and Territories, ABS and AIHW. The ECDSG is responsible for reviewing and making recommendations to amend arrangements for the collection and maintenance of ECEC information in the light of requirements to collect and/or provide data for new systems such as those set in place under the ECEC Quality Agenda. The National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care (NIA ECEC) is also managed through the ECDSG.

## 1.1 Purpose of the review

The Collection is in the midst of its fourth year and with future funding arrangements currently unclear, it is important to consider both the benefits and costs of the Collection in its present form, including any issues which may reduce or limit its potential value in an ongoing capacity.

In this context, the Australian Government Department of Education engaged Deloitte Access Economics to review the Collection from a number of perspectives, including **its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability**. The review also considers the value placed on the Collection by its key users, including whether it is aligned with their priorities and requirements, and whether these broader uses help to outweigh the cost of the current Collection.

Specifically, the objectives of this project were to:

- Document the **purposes to which data in the Collection have been and are being used**, and to identify likely future purposes.
- Canvass the views of key stakeholders to **identify and document gaps in the Collection in meeting current and future data requirements** on preschool participation, and how

these could best be filled. Elements of the collection that are less relevant to information needs, and current and future priorities, will be identified and recorded.

- Identify and detail the costs and benefits of **possible alternatives to the current Collection** that would meet current and future information needs on preschool participation.
- Identify and make **recommendations on methodological issues with the current collection and how they may be addressed** if the Collection were to continue in either the current form, or an alternative form (addressing issues of costs, efficiency, governance, data development, data management, data provision and access to data).

The information for this review has been collected through a structured consultation process with key stakeholders, as outlined in Section 2 below.

## 2 Evaluation methodology

Deloitte Access Economics has leveraged an established framework to support the systemic and focussed gathering of information and evidence from stakeholders. This framework can also be used by the Department to aid decision-making processes with regards to the future of the Collection.

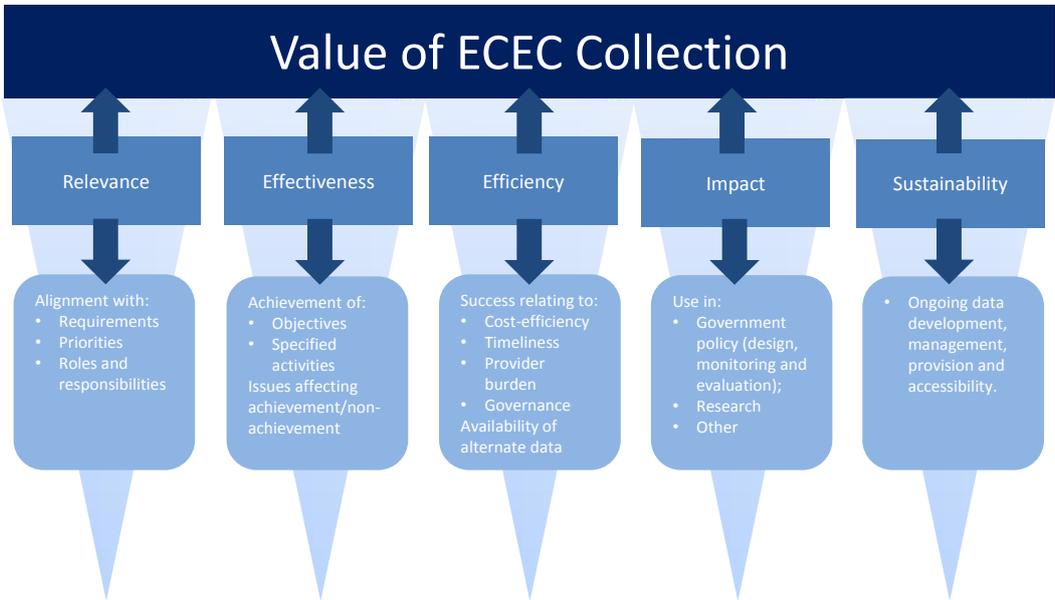
Information was collected through the use of consultation sessions with key stakeholders, which were primarily conducted in person. These consultation sessions typically lasted between one and two hours, and were attended by a range of people who work closely with the Collection, including from both a policy and data management perspective.

The structure of the consultation sessions was guided by a consultation stakeholder guide, which was distributed to participants prior to the meeting.

### 2.1 Conceptual framework

In order to understand the value of the Collection, this has been measured against five key themes: **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability** (Figure 2.1). Each of these elements is explained in more detail below.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework



#### Relevance

To what extent, and for what purposes, do users value/require the Collection, and does this align with current priorities?

The **relevance** of the Collection relates to the extent to which the Collection is suited to the priorities and requirements of the key stakeholders. The strategic importance of the Collection has also been considered.

## Effectiveness

Does the Collection meet its objectives on data quality?

The **effectiveness** of the Collection can be evaluated by assessing the success of the Collection in its current form in facilitating its intended activities.

## Efficiency

Can the Collection be streamlined and/or are there alternatives available?

At its most basic level, **efficiency** measures the outputs of an activity in relation to its use of inputs. While the outputs of data collections are particularly difficult to value, the focus of efficiency notions is to ensure that activities are being undertaken using the lowest level of resources to achieve the desired results.

## Impact

Is the Collection widely used?

Assessing the **impact** of the Collection involves understanding the intended and actual uses of the Collection. In particular, attention is given to the Collection's ability to inform government policy (including development, monitoring and evaluation activities), and to its use in other research activities.

## Sustainability

Can the Collection serve a broader purpose?

The **sustainability** of the Collection relates to its ongoing importance and use in the current policy environment and context. This includes ascertaining the mechanics through which the Collection can be enhanced to better serve stakeholder needs.

## 2.2 Stakeholders

There are a number of key stakeholders related to the Collection, many of whom perform multiple roles throughout the statistical cycle. For example, the federal and State/Territory Departments of Education are both providers of input data into the Collection (in the form of administrative data supplied to the ABS), as well as users of the end data.

Key stakeholder roles have been shown in Table 2.1. The involvement of stakeholders in various aspects of the statistical cycle was considered when undertaking the consultations.

Table 2.1: Key stakeholder roles

Stakeholder	Members of ECDSG	Develop/maintain methodology & standards	Provide input data	Collect, collate, analyse & disseminate data	Use output data
Australian Government Department of Education	✓	✓	✓		✓
Australian Government Department of Social Services			✓		
Australian Bureau of Statistics	✓	✓		✓	✓
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	✓	✓			✓
State and Territory Education Departments	✓	✓	✓		✓
Productivity Commission	✓	✓			✓

## 3 Consultation findings

The consultations sought to qualitatively assess whether an investment into retaining the Collection on an ongoing basis is worthwhile when the costs associated with its administration are taken into account. The section below presents the messages that have emerged from the consultations, structured against an evaluation framework consisting of five key themes: **relevance**, **effectiveness**, **efficiency**, **impact** and **sustainability**. Where relevant, recommendations have been noted throughout this Section.

The views reflected in this report are confined to those voiced by members of the Australian Government Department of Education, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Productivity Commission (PC) and State and Territory Education Departments during the consultation sessions held as part of this project.

All stakeholders were in agreement that early childhood education is a fundamental element of childhood development, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, research into the role and outcomes of education more generally have been relatively limited in the Australian context, particularly when compared with the health sector. For many stakeholders, this Collection has the potential to be a key element of future research activities to inform policy, however several issues (such as scope, access and comparability) would need to be addressed in order for this to be realised.

Given the current use of the Collection as a primary means of distributing funding, there is a general feeling among stakeholders that role of the Collection to inform a wider research agenda was somewhat limited. In addition, the linkage of the Collection to Performance Indicators has also served to 'politicise' the Collection, which is not particularly conducive to a long-term strategic planning.

While balancing the costs and benefits of the Collection, it is clear that collection of early childhood education data has significant value, however the current scope of the Collection as well as its strong links to the National Partnership, have limited its capacity to provide beneficial research to the sector. In general, the costs of the administering the Collection – when considered as a component the funding allocated to the sector as a whole – where seen as relatively low, however the burden on individual States and Territories varied significantly. Overall, a funding structure which encourages both Federal and State/Territory contributions was seen as most sustainable, provided those who provide funding for the Collection (i.e. bear the costs) are also provided with sufficient access.

### 3.1 Relevance

The Collection was originally established and funded to **provide nationally comparable statistics on early childhood education and care**. This key role of satisfying National Partnership reporting requirements through the measurement of performance indicators has had a significant role in directing both the scope and data standards of the Collection,

which is underpinned by the Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set (ECEC NMDS) managed by the AIHW.

In general, the Collection appears to be delivering on its key role to deliver data reporting requirements for measurement of the NP-related performance indicators, although there remain some significant data quality issues, including the national comparability of the data. However, many stakeholders feel that the value and relevance of the Collection could be enhanced significantly if it was further developed – either by expanding or reconfiguring the existing Collection – to serve a wider purpose in developing and answering key research questions in the early childhood education and development space.

## Current uses

The key uses of the data were generally consistent across all stakeholders, and appeared to be well understood by the Department. These include the data being used to

- Monitor progress against the Universal Access target and associated Performance Indicators relevant to the National Partnership;
- Contribute to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) international reporting; and
- Prepare ministerial briefings and for broader government reporting purposes.

The Collection is also the main source of information for AIHW’s report on Child Protection and the Report on Government Services (RoGS) produced by the Productivity Commission. Supplanted by ABS data, the Productivity Commission also use the Collection for its Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report and measuring progress against COAG’s closing the gap targets as stated in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA).

At the State and Territory level, data from the Collection is used to fulfil a number of objectives, including

- Annual reporting and budget papers;
- Workforce monitoring and planning; and
- The identification of service delivery gaps.

The Australian Government Department of Education did not see the release of data in March as having a limiting impact on the capacity of the States and Territories to utilise the published Collection. However, as many jurisdictions noted, the publication of the national Collection in March precludes their use of the data beyond ministerial briefings. This is generally because planning activities for the year need to be finalised prior to the end of the previous financial year. As a result, States and Territories tend to rely more heavily on their local data holdings (which contribute to the Collection) to inform planning and research activities, rather than data published in the Collection itself. It was also acknowledged by many jurisdictions, however, that given the timing of the reference week in August, a March release represented a reasonable level of timeliness.

A select number of jurisdictions also have a strong emphasis in providing data back to the providers (or services) themselves. This technique is broadly known as a ‘return to source strategy’, and as well as engaging providers, also encourages the use of data for local planning and strategy purposes.

Although there were initial ideas that the data would be delivered by the ABS to the AIHW as part of a wider data linkage and research project, this has yet to commence. From the perspective of some stakeholders, this delay has been attributed to a lack of ownership at the ministerial level, and a changing policy environment due to the different focus of the recent government. However, although little has been accomplished at the national level, some research activities are being conducted at the State-level (including a partnership between South Australia and the Northern Territory) which could potentially provide a road map for future research activities.

Recommendation 1.1: Move towards the development of the Collection as a standalone data source for the ECEC sector, which has strong links to the Performance Indicators (and ensures that key indicators can be monitored), but is not solely driven by their design.

## National consistency

Although nationally consistent data is a key concern to many stakeholders, particularly at the Australian Government level, there are some doubts as to whether **(a) the data is currently provided on a nationally consistent basis, and (b) whether the data can be provided on a nationally consistent basis**. More specifically, although significant improvements have been made in the years since the Collection was established, with funding provided to States and Territories specifically for this purpose, there are some ongoing concerns whether the Collection is truly comparable across jurisdictions. In many instances, the issues with comparability reflect the different service models and data collection methodologies operating in the individual States and Territories.

Each jurisdiction operates under different models of preschool service delivery, with the direct line of sight being typically obstructed for States and Territories with a higher share of non-government preschool providers (either standalone or within LDC). For the Collection, data for this group is compiled by the Australian Government Department of Education through the CCMS collection. After Machinery of Government changes in late 2014, in future the CCMS data will be managed by the Department of Social Services. The distribution of preschools services between the government and non-government sector differs significantly between the States and Territories.

There are also significant variations in the way that State and Territories obtain data for the Collection. In addition, the meaning for certain data items can also vary by jurisdiction, depending on the formal definition of preschool adopted in a State or Territory. For example in some jurisdictions, this captures only four year olds, while in others it may also include three year olds that meet certain schooling cut-offs due to the month of their birth.

In addition, there appears to be ambiguity across jurisdictions on how the collection of count data on teacher qualifications at each venue, a central change enforced through the NPA, is translated into the *presence* of qualified teachers over the two week reference period and service delivery throughout the year. There is also uncertainty on what constitutes 'disadvantage', with some States electing to use the ABS' Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA index) while others rely on the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI index) to provide measures of disadvantage, depending on which index is believed to capture factors most relevant to each State. State and Territory agreement on clear definitions for these two areas would improve the overall comparability of the Collection.

Recommendation 1.2: Continue to exercise caution when undertaking any national comparisons, including attaching caveats and footnotes where appropriate.

In recognition of these potential inconsistencies, State and Territory consultation participants urged **that comparisons at the national level should be made with caution**. Appropriate messaging and caveats inserted in ABS publications around these issues have been recommended by some State and Territory department members as a possible concession, along with further investigation and consultation with jurisdictions.

From a national perspective, the loss of any particular State or Territory from the Collection would significantly undermine the value of the Collection. However, it was also acknowledged that this would likely be seen differently from a State perspective. Overall, most jurisdictions had little concern about national consistency other than its **relationship to the measurement of performance**, or the capacity to conduct research at the national level – such as comparing different service models to understand which delivers the most effective and efficient outcomes.

## Consistency over time

Though it is agreed that the Collection should be flexible to accommodate changes in policy priorities, users of the Collection have emphasised that in addition to jurisdictional consistency, data items should be comparable over time. This would allow for measured policy testing, through the identification of trends and data linkage to other more established related collections. At present, this is somewhat compromised due to changes in governments (federal and jurisdictional) and their associated priorities, as well as general ‘churn’ in the policy focus in the ECEC space. **This issue also relates to the overall purpose of the Collection, which some stakeholders emphasised may require revisiting and/or further discussion and clarification in the coming years.**

Many stakeholders, including at both the Australian Government and State/Territory level, expressed unease that the close relationship between the Collection and the Performance Indicators had resulted in **constant ‘tweaking’ of definitions and associated metadata**. Although some of these changes had driven improvements in the Collection (specifically in relation to better defining some data items), some were seen to be unnecessary, especially given that the core policy intent under the NPA has not shifted since its establishment. The lack of reliable time series data is considered a major limitation of the current Collection.

From a practicality perspective, the constant changes have caused some level of dissatisfaction at the State and Territory level by imposing more administrative burden on departmental staff and the service providers that must collect new information without an associated increase in funding. It has been suggested that longer lead times be given to foster common understanding across data providers and users. One consultation participant recommended that a lead time of 18 months would be ideal to implement changes effectively.

One suggestion, which was recommended for exploration by several stakeholders, was to consider redesigning the Collection into a selection of (1) core and (2) rotating variables. The core subset of variables would be collected each year to provide a consistent time series of data, whereas the rotating variables could operate on a three-yearly cycle. This

module-based approach would **enable an improved balance between flexibility and consistency, and would also allow for the broadening of the scope of the Collection.** Further, collecting data against a broader set of variables would allow these components to be aggregated differently as definitions or areas of focus changed over time. However, it was also acknowledged that this design would be particularly difficult to implement given the existence of the nine (9) different administrative systems and processes used to collect data at the State and Territory level (and Australian Government level in the case of non-government preschools).

## 3.2 Effectiveness

### Data quality issues and concerns

It was generally agreed by all stakeholders that there have been significant improvements in the quality of the Collection over time. This is reflected in the recent removal of the 'Experimental Estimates' qualification from the ABS publication which accompanied the 2010 and 2011 data releases (although not all stakeholders were satisfied that the removal of this caveat was appropriate). In particular, the move of all jurisdictions from an **aggregate data to unit record level data basis was noted as a particularly important move towards improving quality.**

For many stakeholders, particularly those with a relatively large proportion of services provided by the non-government sector, **a key data quality concern remains the Child Care Management System (CCMS).** This system is used by child care services to record child enrolment and attendance information so that the Australian Government Department of Education can calculate fee reductions and pay services on behalf of eligible families. Although it is widely acknowledged that this is an administrative system, and that the preschool component of the data collection is not compulsory for service providers as there is no funding attached to it, it remains a key data concern for almost all stakeholders.

**One issue noted by many jurisdictions in regards to the CCMS is the perceived lack of transparency around data produced by this system, particularly regarding the imputation methodology used to account for known underreporting.** However, it was noted by the Australian Government Department of Education that the data produced by the CCMS has been discussed in several ECDSG meetings. More broadly, CCMS data is used as a supplement to jurisdictional data, where jurisdictions have been unable to collect and provide data themselves. The Australian Government Department of Education has previously provided aggregate data to jurisdictions to improve their own reporting. The Australian Government Department of Education also noted that they do not have access to unit-record level data from jurisdictions. Overall, there appears to be a general lack of data transparency between the Australian Government and jurisdictions.

The lack of access to unit record level CCMS data also hinders the ability of States and Territories to investigate potential data anomalies prior to their publication, with similar issues encountered from an Australian Government Department of Education perspective.

Recommendation 2.1: Provide greater transparency to State and Territory stakeholders regarding the imputation methodology used for the CCMS component of the Collection, including potential access to the data prior to provision to the ABS (noting this is currently underway through ECDSG).

There was a recommendation from some stakeholders, particularly those most affected by any bias in the CCMS data, that the ABS independently evaluate the quality of data produced by the CCMS, and publish their findings in the form of detailed analysis available to all key stakeholders. Another suggestion was also made in relation to the improvement of transparency in data quality issues would be the release of data quality indicators, which measure and/or grade each data item in relation to its comparability, consistency and reliability.

## Contribution to research and evaluation

The current contribution of the Collection to research and evaluation activities is constrained by two primary factors, namely:

- Access to unit-record level data; and
- Scope of the data collection.

**Access to data from at the Collection and the unit record level was cited as a significant issue by most stakeholders, and places a large limiting factor on the capacity to undertake research both at the micro (individual) and macro (aggregate) level.** Despite the strong credentials of the ABS, several stakeholders noted the decision by the ABS to collect what is essentially administrative data under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, which includes provisions relating to the privacy and confidentiality of information obtained by the ABS, as a **significantly limiting factor on the contribution of this Collection to wider research.**

From an ABS perspective, however, the ability to provide a clear and consistent message about privacy and confidentiality to the public is a significant benefit to the placing the Collection under this Act. The Act also incorporates other important messages, including the 'access for all' provision. However this introduces additional complications for jurisdictions who only gain access to published data on the same day as the wider community, thus limiting their ability to understand and prepare for unexpected results prior to drafting Ministerial briefings.

In particular, the difficulty in obtaining unit record level data significantly hinders the capacity to undertake data linkage activities. Although there have been some attempts to gain access to unit record level data by approaching individual States, there is no obligation for States to provide this data, the process can be convoluted and unclear, and there remains large gaps for some States where data is collected only via the CCMS. However, even if access to unit record level data was obtained for all relevant stakeholders, the contribution of the Collection to research and evaluation activities is still likely to be limited by other factors such as the methodology used, comparability across States, definitions, scope and accuracy.

Although there was strong interest from some stakeholders in conducting research into the broader early childhood education space in the Australian context, particularly through the

use of data linkages, other stakeholders noted that they did not have the capacity or resources to conduct the research internally. Other stakeholders also commented that dedicated academics and researchers should be provided access to the data in order to develop key findings which could be shared with stakeholders more broadly.

There was a strong desire from almost all stakeholders to begin (or continue in some instances) to link the Collection to other data collections, including those ranging from the *National Perinatal Data Collection* (NPDC) managed by the AIHW, through to education and employment outcomes, including the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

More broadly, some stakeholders noted that the national research agenda for early childhood development had become somewhat lost, with each year of the Collection being viewed as micro-data for each individual year of Performance Indicators, rather than as an integral and ongoing collection within a broader research context. There were strong views that the various data in this space (e.g. the Collection, the Childhood Education and Care Survey, the National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census, the Child Care Management System and the Australian Early Development Census) could be brought together in a more meaningful way. In addition, there was some support and discussion for a comprehensive ‘data audit’ of information available related to early childhood development in Australia.

## Effectiveness of the ‘reference week’ model

Although the ‘reference week’ model was generally acknowledged as the most viable option for the Collection, and an effective snapshot of enrolment, there were some issues of note. In particular, **the extrapolation of attendance data collected during the reference week to the entire year was not considered appropriate by stakeholders**. In some jurisdictions, the reference week (in August) falls within peak flu season, while in other States and Territories, regional school holidays affect attendance during this particular week. Some jurisdictions are also aware that Term 3 (August) is a low point for enrolment and attendance. Some States, through other research, have been able to demonstrate that the reference week is not reflective of the entire year (with regards to attendance).

Recommendation 2.2: Continue the use of the reference week model, however exercise caution when extrapolating relevant data items (e.g. attendance) over the full year.

In some cases, the ‘reference week’ is actually two weeks to reflect the service provision models operating in some States (i.e. based on a fortnightly cycle rather than a weekly cycle). This may also affect the comparability of some data items when comparing across jurisdictions, and should be carefully considered when making comparisons.

## Governance and working relationships

Although there was a **generally positive response to the current governance arrangements around the Collection, there were also a number of concerns raised, including issues of clarity of roles and responsibilities, significant turnover of personnel on governance bodies, the number of stakeholders involved, the timeliness of collaboration, and the extent of consultation undertaken in some instances**. In addition, many stakeholders felt

that the governance of the Collection should be further separated from the Universal Access policy, and that confusions between the Performance Indicators, the National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) and the Collection itself needed to be resolved through documentation.

Recommendation 2.3: Continue to ensure that governance arrangements are clear and well documented, including responsibilities for decisions and their communication to key stakeholders, primarily through ECDSG.

In terms of responsibilities for the Collection, many stakeholders see this as being shared between the Australian Government Department of Education, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, with some confusion over which is the lead agency. There are also some concerns that the sharing of data governance activities between the ABS and the AIHW arose out of historical circumstances, and introduces an element of confusion and inefficiency. Although all stakeholders, including the ABS and AIHW are identified in the NIA ECEC, there appear to be some dual roles and/or overlaps between the two agencies, particularly in regard to the definition of data items and the scope of the Collection.

Stakeholders, particularly at the jurisdictional level, also raised concerns about the **lack of transparency around key processes and decision points**, as well as the limited ability of users of the Collection to provide input. One particular issue noted was the relatively late distribution of complex and in-depth papers only a few days prior to meetings where decisions were to be made. Some suggestions of a 'workshop model' of consultation were put forward as a potential alternate discussion model.

Due to the embargo process implemented by the ABS, **governance of the data itself is difficult, as members of governance groups are not privy to the national data collection prior to its public release**. This significantly limits the ability for stakeholders to discuss and consider data quality issues in the governance environment.

Some stakeholders expressed concern that in 2014 funds which had been previously set aside for research purposes were used by the Australian Government Department of Education for national reviews such as the review of the NP.

There appears to be a generally positive working relationship between the individual States and Territories and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, with several jurisdictions making positive comments about the good working relationships with the dedicated statistical liaison officers that the ABS have implemented. Both the ABS and AIHW were seen as generally responsive and willing to work together to provide solutions at the operational level, and the level of secretariat support from the Department, particularly recently was noted by several stakeholders.

## 3.3 Efficiency

### Frequency

There was strong consensus from all stakeholders that an annual Collection was the ideal frequency for data of this nature, particularly considering the data collection model. It was felt an annual Collection created the ideal balance between respondent burden and ensuring the maintenance of momentum and working relationships between service providers, State and Territory education departments, and the ABS. The requirement for an annual collection is also closely linked to its key purpose in informing performance indicators. Other reporting requirements, such as those related to RoGS and the OECD are also required on an annual basis.

Recommendation 3.1: Retain the Collection as an annual data collection.

Although some cost savings are likely to result from reducing the frequency of the Collection, these are likely to be minimal as momentum is lost. Many stakeholders also consider that many of the fixed costs in establishing the Collection have now been expended, and that the Collection is becoming increasingly efficient over time. Furthermore, in the current environment of ongoing and significant policy changes, there is concern that a less-than-annual Collection may reduce the capacity to monitor and understand the impacts of short-term policy changes.

On the other hand, a key benefit of a less frequent Collection, or survey based model would lead to a **reduction in respondent burden**; however this would be balanced by difficulties in maintaining relationships and managing issues of staff turnover over a long time period. Any reduction in frequency, such as a move to a two or three year cycle – although not recommended - would also need to be timed sufficiently so that it can be linked to other relevant collections in the future, such as the AEDC.

Recommendation 3.2: Retain the census format of data collection (as opposed to a smaller survey-based model) in order to maximise the use of administrative provider data and potential for future linkage with other datasets that are built on unit record level information.

### Systems and processes

Although the Collection itself is managed by the ABS, there are essentially nine separate systems (the CCMS, plus a system for each State and Territory) for collecting, storing, and managing the data which contributes to the national collection.

In many cases, there is evidence that the existence of the national Collection has significantly enhanced both the efficiency that States are able to collect the relevant data, as well as the quality of data collected. In particular, the centralisation of data standards has had a particular impact on streamlining the data collected; however this has been easier for some jurisdictions to implement than others.

Recommendation 3.3: Encourage continued efficiency improvements in systems and processes through forums such as an annual workshop between State and Territory representatives that focuses on sharing learnings, identifying best practice and moving towards the harmonisation of collection methodologies.

## Alternatives

It was acknowledged by all stakeholders that the Collection is the only national data collection in this space, with no alternate data collections identified. However, it was noted that several other data collections do contain data relevant to early childhood education and development, and that it would be valuable to conduct an **audit of available data in the coming years**.

Although a sample, or survey collection, was discussed with most stakeholders, **this was not seen as an appropriate model of Collection**. In particular, the desire for unit record level data, and the ability to disaggregate data by variables such as Indigenous Status, and small geographic area, is not likely to be facilitated by a survey. Most stakeholders did agree however that there is significant scope to improve the administrative functions of data collection, including through different models of online collection.

Calculating the exact costs and benefits of the current and alternate collections would require a review which extended beyond the scope of consultations. However it is clear from this review that **the relative cost of any collection in this space would represent only a small component of funding distributed to the sector, and that the collection of evidence to ensure that funding is targeted, efficient and effective is of key benefit**.

## 3.4 Impact

### Consequences of ceasing the Collection

As a result of there being no known alternative data collections, the ceasing of this Collection would result in a significant data gap, with no other sources of national data. This is likely to become problematic over time, as evidence based policy making becomes more difficult without sufficient data.

At the Australian Government level, the consequences of ceasing the Collection depend primarily on its current and future uses, particularly in reporting processes and considerations of the broader picture on national data collections in early childhood education.

However, for some States and Territories, particularly those which either collected data for their own local purposes, or who were significantly burdened by the collection and management of data specifically for the Collection, the consequences of ceasing the Collection (in its current form) would be largely positive. In particular, some jurisdictions noted that the disbandment of the Collection would be a cost-saving and reduction in 'red tape', particularly where data for government preschool programs were regularly available through regular administrative processes. As a result, it is unlikely that all States and Territories would maintain the provision of data to an annual collection if the impetus and funding attached to the current measurement of performance targets were discontinued.

This means that the Collection would no longer be national in scope, which would severely diminish its value, particularly from an Australian Government Department of Education perspective.

Overall, however, **the loss of the Collection at the national level would significantly reduce the capacity to produce evidence-based policy decisions and recommendations in the ECEC space within the Australian context.** This would be considered particularly troubling given both the sizeable funding, attention and importance attached to this sector. Moreover, advocates of data linkage believe that the ceasing of the Collection would mean a loss of the potential to build education pathways that link to other research infrastructure, including in the health sector. As a relatively new collection, some stakeholders also believe that there has not been a sufficient time series yet produced to assess the impact of the Universal Access policy.

Recommendation 4.1: The Collection, even in its current form, should not be ceased until an alternate nationally comparable dataset on early childhood education and care is development.

## 3.5 Sustainability

### Potential uses/value of the Collection

The Collection should be seen as an important and independent national data collection, with some stakeholders likening its current stage of development as similar to where Vocational Education and Training (VET) statistics were approximately 20 years ago. The collection of preschool data shares several similarities with the VET sector in that it brings together a diverse set of service providers which provide a non-compulsory facility. Many stakeholders felt that the potential of the Collection would only be realised through a combination of making unit record level data available, in combination with increasing the scope of the Collection in some way.

There was general consensus across all stakeholders that future uses and the value of the Collection would be significantly tied to the capacity of the Collection to be linked to other relevant datasets within the early childhood space. Although some stakeholders noted some reluctance about the capacity of the current Collection to answer key research questions, the majority of stakeholders felt that the future of research in this space required a path towards data integration.

Although many stakeholders agreed that the value of the Collection could be significantly expanded, including its use in broader research and policy questions, it was also clear that these individual questions and areas of interest had not yet been clearly articulated. Several jurisdictional stakeholders noted that this articulation would be most effective and relevant at the national level (rather than individual States developing research agendas on broad areas of education policy), however noted that the funding originally designated to research had been redirected.

As a result, the data gaps left by the ceasing of the Collection are particularly difficult to demonstrate. However, what was clear through the consultations is that the area of early childhood education is likely to expand in both its importance and the level of funding available. As a result, the discontinuation of the only Collection currently operating in this

space would leave both a gap in the current knowledge, but also importantly, would mean that future research would also be limited by the availability of data. More specifically, three broad areas in which data from the Collection could potentially be used were discussed during the consultations: data linkage, cost-benefit analysis, program evaluations and policy reviews. These uses are in addition to the regular reports on performance.

### **Data linkage**

Research conducted through data linkage was considered to be of high priority by many stakeholders (although a small number questioned its potential usefulness at the State level). The move towards all jurisdictions providing unit-record level data was seen as a key step towards data linkage projects being feasible, however there are also several contributing factors that make this type of research difficult to undertake in the current environment. In particular, the inability of the ABS to provide unit-record level data to the AIHW (which has significant experience in data linkage projects) has been identified as a key barrier. If such research is possible in the future, assuming privacy and other relevant concerns have been identified, the discontinuation of this Collection and the subsequent loss of preschool data would leave a significant gap in any project that linked early childhood data through to school and post-school data.

It is expected that data linkage projects will be able to contribute to evidence in relation to areas such as the outcomes for children who do/do not participate in preschool programs, with a particular focus on those from vulnerable groups. In many cases, data linkage is the only method of obtaining information on those children who do not participate in preschool programs.

### **Cost-benefit analysis**

The scale of funding delivered to the early childhood education sector, as well as the increasing policy focus means that cost-benefit analysis will have an ongoing role in measuring the outcomes associated with early childhood education. In particular, policy questions such as whether funding should be allocated towards broad or narrow target group(s) are best answered by analytical evidence.

### **Program evaluation**

Program evaluation activities are particularly useful in demonstrating the effectiveness of different policy approaches and service delivery models. They also assist in identifying examples of best practice, which is something that several jurisdictional stakeholders noted a keen interest in. This is particularly important in the area of early childhood education, with each State and Territory having different arrangements for regulating, funding and delivering early childhood education services. This is particularly relevant as the role and importance of early childhood education is increasingly recognised.

### **Policy reviews**

The availability of data, including from this Collection, is also important in the conduct of policy reviews. More specifically, data from the Collection has recently been used extensively in the review conducted by Deloitte Access Economics of the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Education (NP UA ECE). As stated, the

Agreement aims to maintain universal access to quality early childhood education programme(s) to the end of 2014, with a focus on improved participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In addition to its role in assessing the performance of States in meeting these goals, the Collection can assist in defining the goals and outcomes of policy in this sector.

## Factors affecting the sustainability of the Collection

The key factor in both maintaining and improving the sustainability of the Collection is undoubtedly **funding of adequate resources**, both at the Australian Government and State and Territory level. Ideally, this funding should be ongoing, or at least provisioned over a longer time period (as opposed to annual funding decisions) to facilitate both investments in improving systems and processes, but also to encourage a longer-term strategic vision for the broader early education research infrastructure in Australia.

Recommendation 5.1: Ensure funding commitments are over an adequate time period (i.e. several years) to encourage investments in improving systems and process, develop a longer-term strategic vision in relation to early childhood education research, and maintain the engagement of the States and Territories.

There is **little doubt from the perspective of stakeholders, that both the importance of and interest in early childhood education in Australia will continue to grow, and that there will need to be appropriate and adequate evidence available to address key policy and research questions**. As a result, any loss of funding in collecting this evidence now is likely to be spent further into the future in the reestablishment of a similar collection; but with the loss of longitudinal data, the current skills of staff involved in the Collection, and the engagement of the States and Territories.

According to many stakeholders, another key element in ensuring the long-term endurance of the Collection is to **de-link the Collection of data from the National Partnership**. This independence would result in significant advantages to the development of the Collection, and **enhance its ability to monitor progress against a policy of Universal Access, rather than just the ability to measure against specific targets**.

Ongoing sustainability of the Collection would also be significantly enhanced by clearly identifying and mapping **ownership of the data**. For example, unit record level data is considered as fundamental in being able to appropriately conduct program evaluation activities; however except for the ABS – which is significantly limited by its ability to release unconfidentialised data due to internal policy decisions, no other organisation has access to the collection as a whole. In contrast, AEDC data, which is currently collected and managed by The Social Research Centre, has been extensively used in data linkage activities, including linkage to NAPLAN data since 2009 to create an important longitudinal dataset.

Recommendation 5.2: Ownership of the data should be clearly identified, with the owner of the data having sufficient capacity to influence and improve key issues with the current Collection, including funding and access.

More generally, the **issue of access (or lack of access to the data) appears to be a particular area of grievance for many, if not all, stakeholders**. In addition, the incapacity to

access the entire Collection is seen as a major barrier to the effectiveness and sustainability of the Collection by many stakeholders.

Recommendation 5.3: A roadmap towards access at the unit record level should be developed by the data owner, which sets out clear processes and protocols for stakeholders to follow in order to allow users to conduct more robust research and policy analysis.

It was acknowledged however, that the decision for the ABS to manage the Collection is closely tied to its use in determining funding decisions, and that there would need to be a significant level of disentanglement of the Collection from the NP Agreement in order to move the Collection to an alternate entity. In addition, there would need to be **strong governance around the data collection agency in order for the States and Territories to have the confidence in providing data to an alternate to the ABS**. However, regardless of the ultimate managing body, there was strong endorsement for the ABS, the AIHW and the States and Territories to remain closely tied to the Collection through a broader governance group, even without having specific responsibilities for the management of the Collection.

Overall, the Collection appears to **be relatively underutilised given the issues noted above with access and data quality**. However, it has also been acknowledged by some stakeholders that there appears to be subdued interest and demand for research into early education in the current political environment. However, this may change in the future, and without the capacity for the Department to determine the relative effectiveness of various service models and to answer questions such as ‘which service model best prepares children for entry into schooling?’.

Looking to the future, **strong governance, clear ownership and transparency will be critical factors in ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the Collection**. A long-term strategic plan is required for the Collection, as well as associated funding and investments to facilitate the development of the Collection into an important piece of early childhood education research infrastructure which has the capacity to both monitor current policy and inform future policy directions and funding decisions.

Finally, there were some concerns raised that the name of the Collection itself – i.e. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Collection – should be reconsidered given that data collected is limited to that in the ‘year prior to formal schooling’. In contrast, the OECD has widened its definition of early childhood education to encompass the theory that early education starts at birth (or age 0). As a result, there are some concerns that the name of the Collection is misleading as it is collecting data on only a subset of the early childhood education space. Moreover, the Collection is not well ‘future-proofed’ if there is an expansion of focus on early childhood education in future years.

# Appendix A: Consultation questions

## Questions: Australian Government Department of Education

### Introduction

- What is your role in relation to the Collection?

### Relevance

- What are the key federal government priorities in relation to the collection of preschool data?
- What purposes are the Collection used for by the Department?
- Is it important that preschool data is available on a nationally consistent basis?
- How important is consistency of the Collection over time versus responsiveness and flexibility to meet new/revised Performance Indicator requirements?

### Effectiveness

- How well does the Collection currently perform in relation to the following:
  - Provide nationally comparable data?
  - Allow for the collection and accessing of data at unit record level?
  - Allow for data linkage to related data sources?
  - Contribute to research and evaluation activities?
- Does the Collection meet your needs in terms of timeliness, accuracy, coherence, interpretability and accessibility?
- How effective is the current 'reference week' Collection model?
- What are the key factors that influence the quality of data in the Collection? Are these expected to improve/deteriorate into the future?
- How effective are the current governance arrangements?
- How effective are the current working relationships?

### Efficiency

- What is the ideal frequency for the Collection, and what are the associated benefits and costs of a more/less frequent Collection?
- Is the efficiency of the Collection improving over time?
- Do the current systems and processes allow for easy provision of data in accordance with the established data standards? Are there any opportunities for efficiencies?
- Is the Department aware of any current alternatives to the current Collection? If so, what are the costs and benefits associated with these alternatives?

### Impact

- What would be the consequences for the Department if the Collection was ceased?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for performance monitoring purposes?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for statistical and research purposes?

### Sustainability

- What additional value could the Collection provide if known issues were addressed?
- In what other ways could the data be used, and could this be facilitated under existing arrangements?
- What factors could affect the sustainability of the Collection?

## Questions: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

### Introduction

- What is your role in relation to the Collection?

### Relevance

- How does the Collection fit within the wider AIHW work program?
- Is it important that preschool data is available on a nationally consistent basis?
- Would AIHW be involved with the collection of preschool data if it was not externally funded?
- What are AIHW priorities in relation to the collection of preschool data?
- How important is consistency of the Collection over time versus responsiveness and flexibility to meet new/revised Performance Indicator requirements?

### Effectiveness

- How well does the Collection currently perform in relation to the following:
  - Provide nationally comparable data?
  - Contribute to research and evaluation activities?
  - Allow for the collection and reporting of data at unit record level?
  - Allow for data linkage to related data sources?
- Does the Collection meet your needs in terms of timeliness, accuracy, coherence, interpretability and accessibility?
- How effective is the current 'reference week' Collection model?
- What are the key factors that influence the quality of data in the Collection? Are these expected to improve/deteriorate into the future?
- How effective are the current governance arrangements?
- How effective are the current working relationships?

### Efficiency

- What is the ideal frequency for the Collection, and what are the associated benefits and costs of a more/less frequent Collection?
- Are there any opportunities for efficiency in managing the Collection?
- Is the Collection becoming more/less efficient over time?
- Is the AIHW aware of any current alternatives to the current Collection? If so, what are the costs and benefits associated with these alternatives?

### Impact

- What would be the consequences for AIHW if the Collection was ceased?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for performance monitoring purposes?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for statistical and research purposes?

### Sustainability

- What additional value could the Collection provide if known issues were addressed?
- In what other ways could the data be used, and could this be facilitated under existing arrangements?
- What factors could improve the sustainability of the Collection?

## Questions: Productivity Commission

**Note: Questions to the Productivity Commission were in relation to the role as a user of data from this particular Collection (and not the role as part of the wider ECEC inquiry)**

### Introduction

- What is your role in relation to the Collection?

### Relevance

- Is it important that preschool data is available on a nationally consistent basis?
- How important is consistency of the Collection over time versus responsiveness and flexibility to meet new/revised Performance Indicator requirements?

### Effectiveness

- How well does the Collection currently perform in relation to the following:
  - Provide nationally comparable data?
  - Contribute to research and evaluation activities?
  - Allow for the collection and reporting of data at unit record level?
  - Allow for data linkage to related data sources?
- Does the Collection meet your needs in terms of timeliness, accuracy, coherence, interpretability and accessibility?
- How effective is the current 'reference week' Collection model?
- What are the key factors that influence the quality of data in the Collection? Are these expected to improve/deteriorate into the future?
- How effective are the current governance arrangements?
- How effective are the current working relationships?

### Efficiency

- What is the ideal frequency for the Collection, and what are the associated benefits and costs of a more/less frequent Collection?
- Are there currently any alternatives to the Collection that would be fit for purpose?

### Impact

- What would be the consequences for the Productivity Commission if the Collection was ceased?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for performance monitoring purposes?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for statistical and research purposes?

### Sustainability

- What additional value could the Collection provide if known issues were addressed?
- In what other ways could the data be used, and could this be facilitated under existing arrangements?
- What factors could improve the sustainability of the Collection?

## Questions: Australian Bureau of Statistics

### Introduction

- What is your role in relation to the Collection?

### Relevance

- How does the Collection fit within the wider ABS work program?
- Does the ABS have any available information on the requests for access to this data (either web page view statistics and/or customised request information)?
- Would the ABS collect and publish the data if it was not externally funded?
- Is it important that preschool data is available on a nationally consistent basis?
- What are ABS priorities in relation to the collection of preschool data?
- How important is consistency of the Collection over time versus responsiveness and flexibility to meet new/revised Performance Indicator requirements?

### Effectiveness

- How well does the Collection currently perform in relation to the following:
  - Provide nationally comparable data?
  - Contribute to research and evaluation activities?
  - Allow for the collection and reporting of data at unit record level?
  - Allow for data linkage to related data sources?
- What are the key factors that influence the quality of data in the Collection? Are these expected to improve/deteriorate into the future?
- How effective is the current 'reference week' Collection model?
- How effective are the current governance arrangements?
- How effective are the current working relationships?

### Efficiency

- What is the ideal frequency for the Collection, and what are the associated benefits and costs of a more/less frequent Collection?
- Do the current systems and processes allow for easy collection of data in accordance with the established data standards? Are there any opportunities for efficiencies?
- Is the Collection becoming more/less efficient over time?
- Is the ABS aware of any current alternatives to the current Collection? If so, what are the costs and benefits associated with these alternatives?

### Impact

- What would be the consequences for the ABS if the Collection as ceased?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for performance monitoring purposes?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for statistical and research purposes?

### Sustainability

- What additional value could the Collection provide if known issues were addressed?
- In what other ways could the data be used, and could this be facilitated under existing arrangements?
- What factors could improve the sustainability of the Collection?

## Questions: State/Territory Departments of Education

### Introduction

- What is your role in relation to the Collection?

### Relevance

- What are the key state/territory government priorities in relation to the use of preschool data?
- Is data from the Collection used by the Department, and if so for what purposes?
- Is it important that preschool data is available on a nationally consistent basis?
- How important is consistency of the Collection over time versus responsiveness and flexibility to meet new/revised Performance Indicator requirements?

### Effectiveness

- How well does the Collection currently perform in relation to the following:
  - Provide nationally comparable data?
  - Contribute to research and evaluation activities?
  - Allow for the collection and reporting of data at unit record level?
  - Allow for data linkage to related data sources?
- Does the Collection meet your needs in terms of timeliness, accuracy, coherence, interpretability and accessibility?
- How effective is the current 'reference week' Collection model?
- What are the key factors that influence the quality of data in the Collection? Are these expected to improve/deteriorate into the future?
- How effective are the current governance arrangements?
- How effective are the current working relationships?

### Efficiency

- What is the ideal frequency for the Collection, and what are the associated benefits and costs of a more/less frequent Collection?
- Is the efficiency of the Collection improving over time?
- Do the current systems and processes allow for easy provision of data in accordance with the established data standards? Are there any opportunities for efficiencies?
- Is the Department aware of any current alternatives to the current Collection? If so, what are the costs and benefits associated with these alternatives?

### **Impact**

- What would be the consequences for the Department if the Collection was ceased?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for performance monitoring purposes?
- Is there sufficient access to the Collection for statistical and research purposes?

### **Sustainability**

- What additional value could the Collection provide if known issues were addressed?
- In what other ways could the data be used, and could this be facilitated under existing arrangements?
- What factors could improve the sustainability of the Collection?

# Limitation of our work

## General use restriction

This report is prepared solely for the internal use of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. This report is not intended to and should not be used or relied upon by anyone else and we accept no duty of care to any other person or entity. The report has been prepared for the purpose of reviewing the Early Childhood Education and Care national collection. You should not refer to or use our name or the advice for any other purpose.

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