AGECS

INSPIRING FUTURE GENERATIONS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION SURVEY REPORT

2024

The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies

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The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies would like to acknowledge both the Bunurong/Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which we are located in Melbourne. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the Aboriginal language groups across all of Vicotria, whose lands we provide funding for specific projects around Early Childhood Education. We acknowledge their history, their people, and their stories. As an Association we will work together for reconciliation, a process that starts with the acknowledgement of true Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures of Australia and will always value the contribution to our community and culture, the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their communities and their stories.

Contents

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Introduction

In 2022 the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies (AGECS) celebrated 100 years as a charitable organisation. Alongside the celebration of the anniversary, and following reflection motivated by the global Covid-19 pandemic, the AGECS Council recognised a need to revisit the organisational structure and output of AGECS. It was recognised that for continued relevance to the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, AGECS needed to be responsive to the wants and needs of teachers and educators, particularly given the extreme workforce pressures the ECEC sector is currently, and has been for the recent past, experiencing.

The survey this document is reporting on, the AGECS Community Engagement and Consultation Survey 2023, constitutes one of the multiple actions undertaken as part of the AGECS Strategic Plan. The survey was developed by a small sub-committee of AGECS Council members (Sinead O Conaill, Emma Boag and Melissa Adam) and AGECS contractors (Alexandra Heard and Liz Potter) in September 2023. In October 2023 it was then approved by the full AGECS Council to be dispersed to the Victorian ECEC community.

This report shares the findings of the survey and provides discussion and analysis. The intention of the report is to assist AGECS Council in its decision-making, particularly in regard to professional learning provisions for teachers and educators working in ECEC settings.

The report follows the structure of the survey, which was broken down into four main sections. The first section is dedicated to survey respondents' demographic information, the second is dedicated to their professional learning behaviours and the third is dedicated to their professional learning interests and desires. A final set of questions focussed on the current and potential provisions made or funded by AGECS, that do not fall within the spectrum of professional learning, including grants, publications and social media channels.

Scope

This report predominately concerns data collected from early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers and educators in Victoria, Australia. A small number of responses (<12.22%) were captured from early childhood professionals working in other ECEC related roles, including Allied Health and Preschool Field Officers. Whilst AGECS membership is open to those not working directly in ECEC services, AGECS's organisational objectives require a focus on the professional development of teachers and educators working in ECEC. As such, the most detailed analysis will be applied to responses that provide insight into behaviours and desires, rather than the demographic information captured by the survey.

In alignment with the AGECS constitutional objectives, the aim of the report is to highlight the wants and needs of practising ECEC teachers and educators, particularly regarding their professional learning (PL). PL is defined by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) as activities teachers engage in that develop their professional knowledge and practice, particularly for supporting student learning. Registered teachers, which includes early childhood teachers, are required to undertake a minimum of 20 PL hours per year. Educators are also expected to engage in PL, and this is

overseen by their employers rather than the VIT. This is discussed in more detail in section 6 'professional learning interests and preferences'.

The survey was published on the 18th October 2023 and closed on the 20th November 2023. In the six weeks that it was open, 221 respondents completed the survey. Therefore, whilst the findings of the survey will inform AGECS Council's strategic decision-making, they do so as a reflection of a point in time.

Limitations

This report collected data from anonymous ECEC professionals, in the form of a 30-question survey.

Acknowledging the extreme workforce stressors being experienced by those working in ECEC the decision was made to keep all of the questions to the survey optional, rather than requiring a response. This means that for each question there is the possibility of a different number of responses. A limitation resulting from this decision is that we do not know the reason for skipping the question, which constrains some analysis. As in, it is possible that skipped questions are a result of the respondent not having a strong opinion on the question asked, or whether they did not have the time or energy to provide a response. For each question we have included the number of responses, against the total number of responses of 221.

To mitigate the loss of responses from this decision, the survey was developed with as many multiple-choice questions as possible. To maximise the data collected, most multiple-choice questions included an 'Other (please specify)' response, which gathered comments from respondents who felt their perspective was not effectively captured in the choices offered. At times this offered deep insight, but it also highlighted that some respondents misunderstood several of the questions, based on their responses.

Finally, the survey was limited by the scope of AGECS as an organisation. AGECS is a volunteer Council-run charity organisation that is supported by three part-time contractors. It has a limited budget per year that comes from investments, and a small sum that comes from new memberships. This confines the provision of PL and related outgoings in terms of both cost and time. As such, data were only sought on items and resources that AGECS predetermined were feasible prior to the development of the survey. This ruled out live events, or PL that required consistent and time-consuming administration, such as communities of practice.

Additionally, in response to the previously mentioned workforce stressors experienced by ECEC teachers and educators, the decision to provide an incentive to encourage respondents to undertake the survey was made. Anyone who met the eligibility criteria of AGECS membership, i.e. holding an ECEC qualification and working in an ECEC setting, was eligible for free membership to AGECS at the completion of the survey. This had the potential to encourage people to take part in the survey to access the free membership, which may have resulted in some respondents not putting much thought into their responses, presenting as a potential limitation. A full description of the membership incentive follows in the next section.

1. AGECS Membership incentive

Before summarising and discussing the findings of the survey, it is important to describe and discuss the results of the membership incentive. The Community Engagement committee incentivised participation in the survey by offering free AGECS membership to those who completed the survey. The rationale was both to encourage participation in the survey, and to recognise the value of the professional knowledge respondents were sharing with us. It was made clear that this membership offer was only available to those who were eligible for AGECS membership. Eligibility requirements being 1) an early childhood qualification and 2) employment history in an ECEC setting. This was communicated with all 'advertising' of the survey through official AGECS channels, and was reiterated on the first page of the survey.

At the close of the survey, respondents were thanked for their input and instructed to email Liz Potter at programs@agecs.org.au to activate their membership, again being reminded of the eligibility criteria. Contacting Liz directly was decided upon, to ensure anonymity for survey respondents. Within SurveyMonkey, each respondent's answers can be viewed in full, meaning that if a respondent submitted their name and contact information for one question, we could then view their answers to every question. By emailing Liz themselves, anonymity could be maintained.

The process involved respondents who wished to activate their membership emailing Liz with that request. Liz then responded to each individual email, asking for the membership information that is required by both the AGECS constitution and the legislative requirements as documented in the Associations Incorporation Reform Act *2012* (Vic) including qualifications, names and addresses. Membership was activated once the prospective member provided those details.

Of the 221 respondents, 40 identified as current AGECS members, indicating that the survey was undertaken by 181 non-members. Of the 189 non-member respondents, 45 contacted Liz Potter to activate their membership. Of the 45 who emailed to activate their membership, 37 provided full details and had their memberships activated. As of January 2024, 8 inquiries had not been substantiated. It is unclear why the uptake of free membership was so low, or what impact this has on the data collected.

Findings

1. Demographic information of survey respondents

The first set of questions pertained to the demographic information of survey respondents. Particularly, the age, location, employment, and qualification details of ECEC teachers and educators was sought. This information has also been collected separately and analysed in our previous report: the AGECS Early Childhood Professional and AGECS Member Profile Report[1]. The purpose of seeking this information in the survey was to inform the analysis of the survey findings of the subsequent sections.

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[1] Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies [AGECS] (2023), 'The Early Childhood Professional and AGECS Membership Profile Report', AGECS website, accessed 8 January 2024.

Table 1.1 refers to the ages of those who undertook the survey. As can be seen, the respondents skewed to reporting older age brackets, with over 75% of respondents aged 40 years or above, which is considerably above the national average, which shows a more even spread of teachers and educators across each age bracket[2]. Every respondent provided an answer to this question.

Table 1.1 Age of survey respondents 2023		
Age bracket	Responses	
18–24	3.17%	7
25–29	2.71%	6
30–34	6.79%	15
35–39	11.76%	26
40–44	17.65%	39
45–49	19.46%	43
50–54	18.55%	41
55+	19.91%	44
	Answered	**221**
	Skipped	**0**

Table 1.2 refers to the location of the workplace of survey respondents. The majority of responses (76.15%) came from those working in metropolitan locations, with regional towns being the second most selected response, only accounting for 13.30%. Location of workplace is an important consideration when planning for PL provisions, as it can impact access to resources.

Table 1.2 – Location of survey respondent workplace 2023		
Location	Responses	
Metropolitan	76.15%	166
Regional city	8.26%	18
Regional town	13.30%	29
Rural/remote	2.29%	5
	Answered	**218**
	Skipped	**3**

Table 1.3 shows the distribution of ECEC settings that respondents work in. Of note is that zero respondents came from Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) or Family Day Care (FDC). The most common workplace type selected was stand-alone kindergarten, with almost half (49.32%) of respondents choosing this option. This was followed by long day care, which accounted for roughly one quarter of the respondents (25.79%).

The third most common response, selected by 44 respondents, was 'Other (please specify)', for which respondents submitted their own answers into a short comment box. Included in these

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[2] Department of Education, Skills and Employment (17 August 2022), '2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census State and Regional Data Table', Department of Education website, accessed 8 January 2024.

responses were several slight variations of the multiple-choice options, for example 'funded kindergarten', indicating that the respondents did not recognise the language used in the provided options applied to their circumstances. This accounted for 14 responses. Additionally, 4 respondents identified as casual relief teachers across the different setting types and had no alternative to choose that option effectively communicated that, highlighting that this group had been overlooked in the development of the survey.

Of the remaining 26 respondents, workplace types included local government, early childhood advocacy organisations, and consultancy businesses. This group comprised the answers in the survey that were not provided by early childhood educators and teachers, as identified in the scope section of this report.

Table 1.3 – Type of workplace of survey respondents 2023		
Workplace type	Responses	
Early Learning Centre attached to/within a school	10.41%	23
Early Learning Centre of an independent/private school	5.88%	13
Family day care	0.0%	0
Long day care	25.79%	57
Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)	0.00%	0
Stand-alone kindergarten	49.32%	109
Other (please specify)	19.91%	44
	Answered	**221**
	Skipped	**0**

Table 1.4 is concerned with the roles of survey respondents. For this question, respondents were encouraged to select each of the multiple-choice options that were applicable to them. This was to capture that many ECEC teachers and educators hold multiple roles within a service, including nominated supervisor and/or educational leader. This appears to be reflected in the answers, which saw the 221 respondents submit 309 responses. Teaching and educating roles were highly represented, although the format of the question did not allow for a detailed breakdown of multiple role holders, such as those who held nominated supervisor or educational leader as well as teaching or educating positions. However, even without being able to account for educational leaders and nominated supervisors, it is evident that degree qualified teachers, including graduate teachers, were the highest represented group (49.77%), and that certificate and diploma qualified educators were the second most represented group (22.17%).

Additionally, this time, 42 respondents opted for 'Other (please specify)'. The most common response was Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) (13), followed by leadership roles in mentor/coaching/pedagogy (9), management roles (5) and consultants (4). Other roles included paediatric care coordinator, trainer and assessor, Trustee, and Children's Services project officer.

Table 1.4 – Role of survey respondents 2023		
Role	Responses	
Casual relief teacher/educator	8.14%	18
Educational Leader	17.65%	39

Educator (certificate or diploma trained)	22.17%	49
Graduate teacher (graduated within the last three years)	8.14%	18
Nominated supervisor	20.36%	45
Room Leader	2.71%	6
Teacher (degree qualified)	41.63%	92
Other (please specify)	19%	42
	Answered	**221**
	Skipped	**0**

Table 1.5 presents the data on survey respondents' workplace organisational structures. ECEC is a mixed market and there are multiple forms of governance, both within the state of Victoria and between states of Australia. In addition to the multiple forms of governance, there are also different phrases or names that have been used at different junctions in the past, many that are no longer accurate but still used by the ECEC community. As such, for this question the decision was made to provide as much descriptive information as possible to mitigate the risk people would not identify their organisation governance structure. As such, all survey respondents were able to select an applicable option for their own organisation, with 221 responses received. Of those, 4 respondents indicated that they did not know the organisational structure of their workplace, but it is unclear whether they were working directly in ECEC settings or in auxiliary services.

11 of these fell into the 'Other (please specify)' category. These responses appeared to refer to the roles that were not ECEC based (Table 1.4), and included TAFE, government, and disability services.

Of those working in ECEC settings, the vast majority identified their settings as not-for-profit based settings (>89.55%). This applies not only to the response 'Not-for-profit', but also to Council, early years management and volunteer parent committee of management. This is important as there are different contracts, agreements and funding opportunities for services depending on their financial structure. An example of this being that those employed by private sector are not eligible for any government grants or Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Grants.

Table 1.5 –Workplace organisational structure of survey respondents 2023		
Organisational structure		Responses
Council run	15.84%	35
Early years management (formerly known as cluster)	31.67%	70
Not-for-profit	26.70%	59
Private (chain or group provider)	6.79%	15
Private (independent provider)	11.76%	26
Volunteer parent committee of management	15.84%	35
Don't know	1.81%	4
Other (please specify)	4.98%	11
	Answered	**221**
	Skipped	**0**

Table 1.6 shows the proportion of respondents who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. As discussed in the AGECS Strategic Planning Activities overview the AGECS RAP Committee members were asked to advise on the wording of questions pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This survey was undertaken by two people who identified as Aboriginal, and two people who would rather not select an option. All other 217 respondents identified as neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Table 1.6 – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent status of survey respondents 2023		
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Descent Status	Responses	
Yes, I identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0.00%	0
Yes, I identify as Aboriginal	0.90%	2
Yes, I identify as Torres Strait Islander	0.00%	0
No, I identify as neither Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	98.19%	217
I'd rather not say	0.90%	2
	Answered	**221**
	Skipped	**0**

Table 1.7 presents the highest qualification held by survey respondents. In order to work in ECEC in Victoria as an educator, a minimum qualification of a certificate III must be held, hence 'No Qualification' was not provided as an option. The majority of respondents held university qualifications (75.57%), with diploma qualifications being held by under a quarter of respondents (23.08%). This indicates that the 22.17% of respondents who identified as an Educator (certificate or diploma trained) in Table 1.4, hold diploma level qualifications rather than certificate III level qualifications.

Table 1.7 – Highest qualification obtained by survey respondents 2023		
Qualification	Responses	
Certificate	1.36%	3
Diploma	23.08%	51
Graduate diploma	8.60%	19
Bachelor's degree	53.39%	118
Master's degree	12.22%	27
PhD	1.36%	3
	Answered	**221**
	Skipped	**0**

Table 1.8 depicts the years of experience in ECEC that survey respondents held. The results show that survey respondents were highly experienced early childhood professionals, with the majority of respondents (71.04%) identifying 10 or more years of experience in the field. In fact, the individual response selected the most was '20+ years', accounting for almost 40% of answers. This can be interpreted in two different ways. The first is that data collected from experienced ECEC professionals is indicative of well thought out responses honed over years of firsthand experience. The second interpretation is that responses from experienced ECEC professionals aren't as useful

for future AGECS provisions, as what they want may be outdated compared with what less experienced teachers and educators want and need. This is compounded by the fact that these experienced teachers and educators may be closer to leaving the workforce, and AGECS would then be making decisions for people who may not be around to use them. Both options need to be kept in mind when planning PL materials.

Table 1.8 –Years of experience in ECEC of survey respondents 2023

Years of experience	Responses	
Under 1 year	1.81%	4
1–3 years	7.24%	16
4–6 years	9.95%	22
7–9 years	9.95%	22
10–15 years	19.91%	44
15–20 years	11.31%	25
20+ years	39.82%	88
Answered		**221**
Skipped		**0**

The final two questions in this section refer to the relationship between survey respondents and the organisation of AGECS. Of the 219 responses in Table 1.8, the vast majority (81.74%) reported no AGECS membership. This is a welcome response, as one of the purposes of this survey was to collect and respond to the voices of early childhood professionals who we were not already in contact with, aka those outside of the existing AGECS membership base.

Table 1.9 –AGECS member status of survey respondents 2023

Years of experience	Responses	
None of the above	0.00%	0
Yes	18.26%	40
No	81.74%	179
Answered		**219**
Skipped		**2**

Respondents were invited to share why they were not already AGECS members if they selected 'No', and 147 of the 179 'No' respondents provided an explanation. The overwhelming majority of respondents cited they were not members because they had not heard of AGECS before.

Other people expressed confusion about their eligibility to be AGECS members, with some sharing they thought only teachers could be members, and some unaware that AGECS has a membership structure. Cost was a factor for people, who expressed that they were already paying members of other organisations. However, those who identified cost as a factor did not appear to realise AGECS membership is a one-off payment, which can be attributed to general lack of knowledge or understanding of AGECS as an organisation. Part of the AGECS strategy should focus on clear marketing of AGECS structure and provisions, once this has been developed.

This section has reported on the demographic information of the respondents to the AGECS Community Engagement and Consultation Survey 2023. The intention of this section is to describe

the cohort who have responded to the survey on professional learning wants and needs, so that this information can factor into the analysis of the results in the subsequent two sections.

It is apparent that the survey respondents are predominately experienced teachers and educators working in metropolitan kindergartens and some long day cares. There were zero responses from FDC and OSHC staff, which indicates that whilst these groups are not being excluded from AGECS PL offerings, they should not factor into the decision-making process for these provisions. There are many teachers and educators working in regional, rural and remote settings who did not respond to this survey, but who have PL needs. This suggests that when forming decisions based on the findings of this report, separate and careful deliberations must be made on behalf of regional, remote and rural teachers and educators. This consideration also applies to younger and graduate teachers and educators.

Another group whose voices were not captured at the desired rate is those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators. AGECS has had a focus on providing PL that teaches about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and perspectives, but not PL that caters to specific needs of teachers and educators who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This may be a consideration for the AGECS RAP Committee to discuss when engaging with this report.

Additionally, most respondents working as teachers or educators appear to work in not-for-profit settings. Typically, access to grants is restricted to services operating under a NFP model. Settings offering funded kindergarten, whether in an NFP or private setting, also have access to government schemes such as School Readiness Funding. This leaves educators working with children under three in private services as an overlooked cohort, in terms of access to grants and government initiatives. However, whilst this should potentially factor in to AGECS Council decision-making, this also appears to be a group that are not engaged with AGECS as an organisation, as evidenced by demographic information captured in this survey.

These demographic details inform the analysis of the responses in the subsequent two sections, as well as informing any decisions being made about AGECS activities in the next five years.

2. Professional Learning Behaviours and Perspectives

The following section reports on responses captured regarding the current PL behaviours of survey respondents. Of particular focus was the identification and sourcing of PL, formats and modes of engagement with PL, as well as perceived enablers and barriers to the application of learning to practice. Both current and desired practices were sought from ECEC workers in this survey, in separate sections, to allow the AGECS Council to make informed decisions with as much information as possible.

Table 2.1, below, reports on the ways respondents identify their PL needs, as in, the topics they would like to learn more about or the skills they would like to develop or improve. Respondents were encouraged to select as many options as were applicable for them, and 200 respondents provided 1003 responses. This indicates that ECEC teachers and educators are using multiple methods to identify their PL needs, with the average respondent identifying 5 methods they used. Despite being advertised as a PL survey, this question was skipped by 20 respondents.

All methods appeared to be somewhat relevant, with local council cited the least, being applicable to 16% of respondents. The most common methods included local professional network meetings (57.50%), and local conferences (56.50%), both being applicable to more than half of the respondents. School readiness funding was also cited as a popular identification method (50%), however, this funding is only applicable for those working with children in funded kindergarten programs. The popularity of in-person local conferences and network meetings raises valid questions for AGECS, in terms of how to participate or assist in this space.

A small number of people specified other methods. These included personal reflection of practice, post-graduate study and other responses that resembled multiple-choice options, such as networking, their union, and Department of Education.

Table 2.1 –Identification of PL needs survey respondents 2023		
Identity strategies	Responses	
Annual academic journal subscription/s	28.00%	56
Attending local conferences	56.50%	113
Attending local professional network meetings	57.50%	115
Colleagues	51.50%	103
Email subscriptions	35.00%	70
Engaging in my service's Quality Improvement Plan	45.50%	90
Local Council	16.00%	32
Membership with an early childhood organisation (e.g. CCC, ECA, etc)	46.50%	93
Preschool Field Officer	35.00%	70
School Readiness Funding	50.00%	100
Social Media	29.50%	59
Staff appraisal/learning and development plan	45.50%	91
Other (please specify)	5.50%	11
Answered		**200**
Skipped		**21**

Table 2.2 features the methods used by respondents to source specific PL materials. Whilst the previous question asked about the identification of PL needs, this question asked about actions used to engage in PL. Whilst some of the response options are the same between the two tables, the role of the respondent is different. As with Table 1.1 respondents were encouraged to select all of the options that were applicable to them, and 201 respondents provided 1071 responses, averaging roughly five methods per person. Furthermore, all options were relatively popular, with the least popular option still garnering a 30% selection rate. Again, this is important for AGECS to keep in mind as it shows that multiple methods to share resources will catch the attention of more people, and that all methods can be effective.

Table 2.2 –Sourcing of professional learning materials of survey respondents 2023

Engagement methods	Responses	
Email subscriptions	65.17%	131
Hardcopies delivered to work or home	22.39%	45
Online event ticketing website/booking system (e.g. Eventbrite, Humantix)	63.18%	127
Preschool Field Officer	30.85%	62
School Readiness Funding	46.77%	94
Social Media	46.27%	93
Staff meetings	43.28%	88
Training/PD provided by my workplace	75.12%	151
Union membership	30.85%	62
Web search	43.28%	87
Website of early childhood organisation (e.g. ECA)	60.20%	121
Other (please specify)	4.98%	10
Answered		**201**
Skipped		**20**

Table 2.2 shows that the most popular way to source PL is attendance at employer organised training, with three quarters (75.12%) of respondents selecting this option. Whilst this finding is not as relevant for AGECS PL provisions, it does indicate that grants that help fund PL, such as the Fellowship Program for Leadership and Change grant and the Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies' Warrawong grant can effectively facilitate employer organised PL.

Online methods are shown to be popular amongst ECEC teachers and educators, with more than half of respondents identifying websites, emails and online ticketing as typical ways of sourcing PL. This reinforces current AGECS practices, as all three of these methods are already being utilised by the organisation.

10 respondents provided comments in 'Other (please specify)'. Again, several of the responses could be categorised within the multiple-choice options provided. The responses that couldn't be categorised included University libraries (online and in-person) and one person identified the teacher's group PACKTA as a place from which they source materials, PACKTA being a local network in the Mornington Peninsula region.

Table 2.3–Format of professional learning engagement of survey respondents 2023

Engagement format	Responses	
Computer/laptop	93.03%	187
Hardcopy reading/writing	33.33%	67
In-person events and meetings	78.11%	157
iPad/tablet	17.41%	35
Smartphone	21.89%	44
Other (please specify)	0.50%	1
Answered		**201**
Skipped		**20**

Table 2.3 depicts the format through which respondents typically engage with PL For this question respondents were asked to select the two most used formats. 201 respondents provided 491 responses, indicating that several respondents chose more than two formats. The most common format was using a computer/laptop to participate in PL, with 93% of respondents selecting this option. Interestingly, the second most popular option was attendance at in-person events and meetings, with 78% of respondents selecting this option. It is important to note that while in-person appears to be popular, AGECS Council need to carefully consider the organisation's capacity to either facilitate or run in-person PL events and meetings. The one respondent who chose 'Other (please specify)' provided the answer 'podcasts', however, this does not meet the criteria of what this question was asking. Typically, podcasts are accessed through smartphones, although they may be listened to during other activities such as commuting or exercising.

Table 2.4 displays the typical scheduling of survey respondents' engagement with professional learning. This question did not differentiate between attending live (online or in-person) events and self-paced PL engagement, and asked respondents to select all of the options that applied to their typical PL engagement.

Table 2.4–Timetabling of professional learning engagement of survey respondents 2023		
Timetabling options	Responses	
Within work hours	65.17%	131
Outside of work hours, on weekdays (unpaid)	79.60%	160
Outside of work hours, on weekdays (paid)	37.31%	75
On weekends	36.32%	73
On school holidays	33.83%	68
	Answered	**201**
	Skipped	**20**

Table 2.4 shows that the most popular options were weekdays, both within typical working hours (65.17%) and outside of working hours but unpaid (79.60%) and paid (37.31%). Weekends and school holidays were less popular, but still utilised by a significant proportion of respondents.

The final questions being reported on in this section refer to the beliefs and perspectives of survey respondents in terms of the relationship between their practice and the PL they participate in. Table 2.5 reports on a multiple-choice question seeking insight on which aspects of PL enable respondents to apply changes to their practice based on their learnings. Respondents were encouraged to select all the options that applied to them, and 200 respondents provided 680 responses, averaging 3.4 selections per person.

From Table 2.5 it is clear that there are multiple effective enablers that help teachers and educators apply PL to their practice. The most popular option amongst respondents was 'Being given tools that I can use' with 80.5% selecting this. Tools is a broad category, but could refer to templates, learning experience plans/ideas, games and specific techniques, strategies, and other instructional methods to support pedagogy and curriculum design. These are all provisions that would be appropriate output for AGECS, and a point for consideration for the AGECS Council.

Table 2.5– Enablers of PL application to practice of survey respondents 2023

Aspects of PL	Responses	
Being able to access the learning in multiple formats	59.00%	118
Being able to discuss my learning with a colleague	77.00%	154
Being able to see the learning applied in someone else's practice, for example through a case study	56.50%	113
Being given specific instructions and/or practical strategies on how to apply the learning	66.50%	133
Being given tools that I can use	80.50%	161
Other (please specify)	0.50%	1
	Answered	**200**
	Skipped	**21**

Whilst all of the options proved to be popular amongst respondents, AGECS Council should consider what the organisation is able to provide that aligns with these options. Whilst facilitating conversations between colleagues is not something AGECS can actively enable, it may factor into the ways in which PL is presented, or development of accompaniments to PL.

The singular person who selected 'Other (please specify)' shared that their enabler of choice is attendance at PL events with a colleague, which is marginally different from option two 'Being able to discuss my learnings with a colleague', but still likely out of the scope of capability of AGECS.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify any barriers they felt impacted their ability to apply PL to their practice, in the form of a comment box. This received significantly fewer responses than the multiple-choice questions, but the responses that were generated by 109 respondents provided valuable insight.

The major themes present in the responses all referred to deficiencies rather than obstacles. People predominately referred to lacking time, resources and access to relief staffing. Lack of time was present across the most responses, and in several different ways. For some, it applied to time to plan the implementation of changes to practice, for others it involved time to reflect on current, past and future practice, and for many it was the lack of time in their existing practice leading them to feel overwhelmed. Some of the responses regarding time were less common but very insightful. For example, two comments shared the barrier was a lack of time to revisit the professional learning content thus limiting their ability to apply change effectively and knowledgably. This is a known factor in the application of change to practice, which has been addressed in previous AGECS projects such as the project for Cultural Change.

Relief staff shortages and lack of budget for release from contact hours appeared to be the second most common barrier for respondents. This is outside of the scope of AGECS Council, but it is a concern of the early childhood community, particularly in that it contributes to the overall feelings of stress and overwhelm in the ECEC sector, and as such is information that is valuable for AGECS Council to consider when planning PL.

Lack of resources appeared to refer to materials and equipment, and was the third most frequently cited barrier. Regional survey respondents identified themselves here, and shared that physical

distance means that they feel they cannot attend 'quality' PL events in-person, so in this case resources referred to time and cost. Whilst AGECS and the Foundation offer grants that can help with resourcing, these responses suggest some kind of misconception that a change in practice must also be a change in environment/play materials for children. This is not the case, but AGECS Council may wish to consider if it wants to dedicate energy to correcting this misconception, or alternatively providing free digital resources that may be of interest to many teachers and educators.

Finally, outside of 'lacking' as a general barrier, several respondents identified their colleagues as a barrier to implementing changes to practice following PL. Particularly, respondents shared that supporting co-workers to adapt to new practices, especially when these colleagues had not experienced the PL training themselves, was a significant barrier. This is an interesting point for AGECS Council to keep in mind when developing PL, as there may be supplementary PL resources that could assist with the dispersal of learning and new practices.

This section has reported on the current behaviours and perspectives of early childhood professionals who undertook the AGECS Community Engagement and Consultation Survey 2023. The major findings in this section, in regard to AGECS Council planning, concern identification of PL needs and resources and the enablers and barriers of applying learnings from PL to practice.

Of note, there is not one 'perfect' way to advertise or share PL, however AGECS's provision of PL is impacted by the lack of name recognition AGECS currently has in the ECEC community. The respondents to this survey had varied ways of identifying PL needs and PL resources, spanning from local networks, subscriptions to emails and early childhood organisations to ECEC service-based provisions, and all of these ways were applicable to a significant proportion of respondents. It was clear that many respondents were engaging almost equally in online and in-person PL opportunities, and that weekdays both within and outside of regular work hours were the most common times to engage in these opportunities. For AGECS Council this suggests that whilst consideration of in-person events is possible, online events are still being attended by the ECEC community, particularly on weeknights.

ECEC professionals identified aspects of PL that enable their ability to apply the learnings from PL to their practice. Of note, being given tools was an enabler for over 80% of respondents. In fact, all of the options the survey provided were identified as enablers by the respondents, which indicates that Table 2.5 should be closely reviewed when planning for PL, as respondents also found conversations with colleagues, access to multiple formats, case studies and specific instructions/advice to be helpful in this regard.

Finally, barriers to the application of learning to practice that must be considered by Council when planning for PL include feelings of lack of time for planning, reflection and action, lack of resources and lack of relief staff. Whilst AGECS Council is limited in its ability to remove these barriers, being aware of them may alter the delivery or frequency of PL provisions.

With these considerations in mind, the next section focusses on the delivery of PL, in terms of format, mode and content of respondents, based on their interests and preferences.

3. Professional Learning Interests and Preferences

In the body of the survey this section was titled 'AGECS Professional Learning Possibilities'. Whilst the previous section was about any and all current behaviours, this section pertains to the interests and preferences of the respondents, based within a predetermined scope of what can be achieved with the AGECS budget, and contractor and Council members' capacities.

Prior to the survey being conducted, there had been discussion about the capability of AGECS to provide live in-person events. This idea was initially discarded, but based on the responses to the previous section's questions, it is worth revisiting, or alternatively, discerning if and how AGECS could facilitate the attendance of early childhood professionals to live in-person events. However, for the remainder of this section, the questions asked of respondents came from a position that AGECS would not offer in-person events.

The following two charts rank the formats of a range of PL materials and opportunities that AGECS Council felt were within scope. Chart 3.1 displays the respondents' rankings of audio/visual PL formats and chart 3.2 displays the respondents' rankings of text/graphic based PL. From these charts it is clear that online live events were ranked highest by respondents, and self-paced pre-recorded seminars were ranked second. This indicates that the current AGECS method, which is to record the live events and post them on the website as self-paced videos, would theoretically continue to work based on this advice. However, this current method is not being utilised by AGECS members which suggests that there are some other factors, perhaps including awareness, production value and the PL content.

Chart 3.1: Ranking of audio/visual PL formats
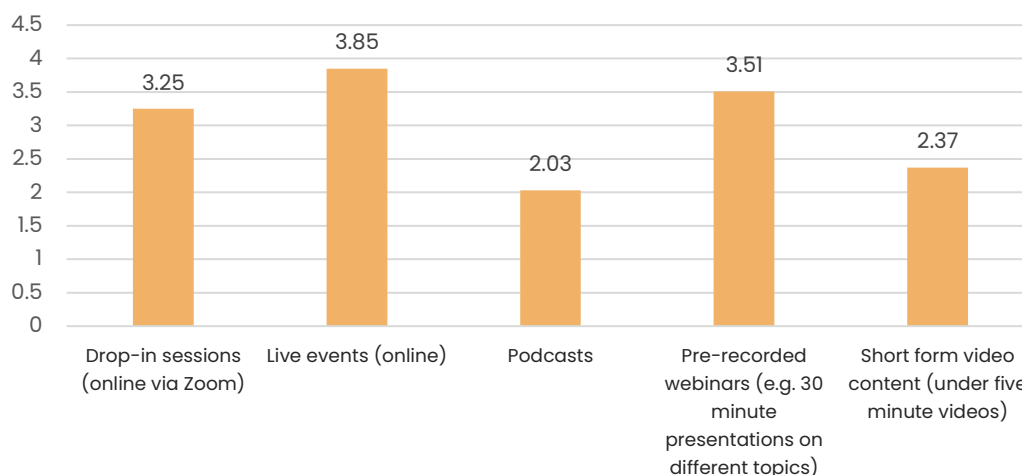
Interestingly, in the previous section respondents identified that 'tools' were something that helped them apply PL to their practice, but in chart 3.2 the items most categorisable as 'tools', i.e. printables and templates, are not as desirable compared with traditional materials such as articles and practice guides. This suggests that what can be considered as tools is not necessarily physical tools.

Chart 3.2: Ranking of text/graphic based PL formats
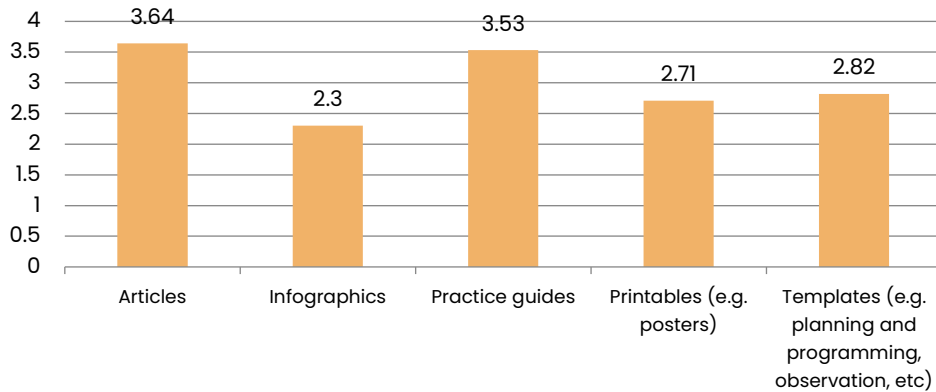
This is also a point where it is important to consider the demographics of those who responded to the survey, who are on average older and more experienced than other ECEC teachers and educators. Their wants and needs may not be reflective of the wants and needs of younger teachers and educators, which means that despite undertaking this survey process, there will still be some elements of trial and error with PL creation.

After asking respondents to rank the different formats, they were asked to select their most desirable and least desirable formats. This information was sought to show clearly the PL items that must be prioritised and the PL items that must be avoided. There are many similarities between this chart and charts 3.1 and 3.3, and reinforces that items like infographics, podcasts and drop-in Zoom sessions are not desired by respondents. It highlights that pre-recorded webinars, live online events and practice guides are very desirable for respondents. Interestingly, despite 'articles' ranking highly in chart 3.2, they are more divisive when looking at chart 3.3, and templates, which were ranked 3rd in chart 3.2, are considerably more popular than articles on this chart 3.3.

Chart 3.3: Desirability of PL formats
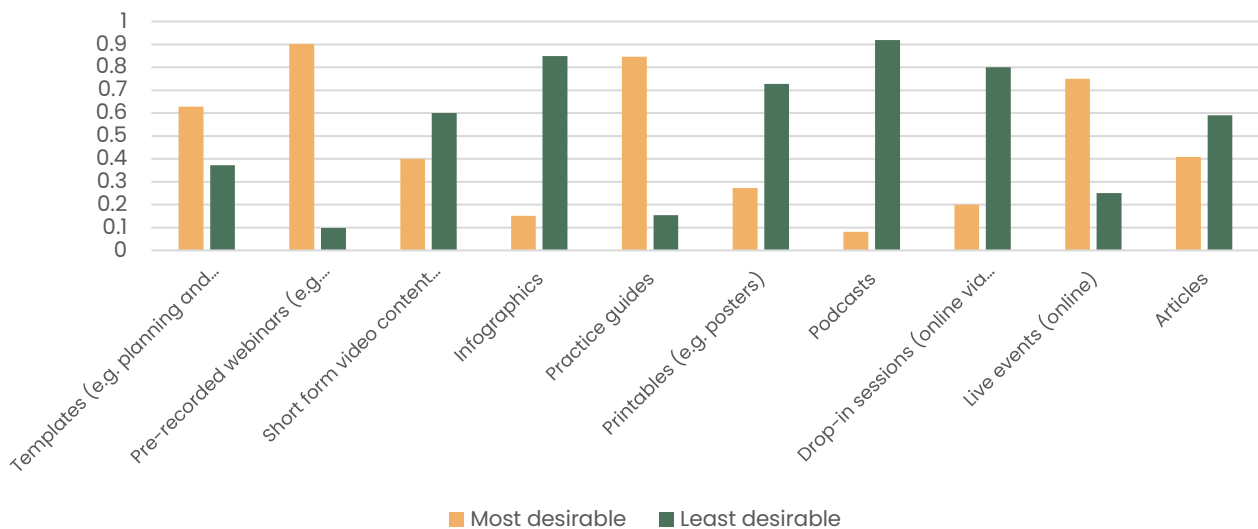
The next questions in this section of the survey sought information on content interest, such as learning areas and topics. Table 3.4 displays the overarching categories of interest of the survey respondents. They were asked to select 3 items out of the 8 options, and 176 respondents selected 559 choices, averaging 3 items each. The intent of this question was to get a broad understanding of what respondents were looking for in PL, before providing prescriptive 'content' options, so that in future we can use this information to guide PL decisions.

The most popular categories of PL were to do with professional practice including new and emerging practices (81.25%), the practices of other teachers and educators (52.27%), reflections on practice (46.59%). Less popular options included refreshers on established topics (22.73%), early childhood theory (28.41%) and participating in academic research (7.39%).

Table 3.4– Overarching topics of interest of survey respondents 2023

Topics	Responses	
Early childhood theory	28.41%	50
Books, songs and fingerplays	31.25%	55
Learning about new research	44.89%	79
New and emerging practices and topics	81.25%	143
Participating in academic research through surveys	7.39%	13
Reflections on practice	46.59%	82
Refreshers on established practices and topics	22.73%	40
Seeing the practices of other services or other educators	52.27%	92
Answered		**176**
Skipped		**45**

Table 3.5 refers to respondents' specific topics of interest. For this question 27 options were provided, and respondents were asked to select their top 5. 176 respondents answered, selecting 930 responses, averaging roughly 5 per respondent as requested.

Table 3.5– Specific topics of interest of survey respondents 2023

Topics	Responses	
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives	50.00%	88
Inclusive education practices / Inclusion and diversity	42.05%	74
Trauma informed practice	32.95%	58
Play and play-based learning	32.39%	57
Identifying developmental delays	31.82%	56
Language and literacy	26.70%	47
Organisational topics (e.g. leadership, management, documentation, programming and planning, etc)	26.70%	47
Risky play	23.86%	42
Difficult conversations with families	23.30%	41
Wellbeing	22.73%	40
Mentoring/coaching colleagues (not VIT mentoring)	20.45%	36
Leadership training	19.89%	35

Peer relationships (particularly involving those experiencing emotional or developmental challenges)	19.32%	34
Sustainability	19.32%	34
STEM	16.48%	29
Working with families and care-givers from diverse backgrounds	16.48%	29
Developmental milestones	15.91%	28
Digital technologies (ICT) in early childhood	15.34%	27
Strength based language	13.64%	24
Music and/or dance	12.50%	22
Visual art	11.36%	20
English as an additional language (children and/or their families)	10.80%	19
Children's physical health	9.66%	17
Babies and toddlers' content	7.39%	13
VIT provisional registration	2.84%	5
Drama	2.27%	4
Other (please specify)	2.27%	4
Answered		**176**
Skipped		**45**

The visible trend in the responses is inclusive, diverse and equitable education, with the most popular responses being 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives' (50%), 'inclusive education practices/inclusion and diversity' (42.05%) and 'trauma informed practice' (32.95%). 'Identifying developmental delays' (31.82%) and 'difficult conversations with families' (23.30%) also made it into the top 10, indicating that inclusive and diverse practices are a topic of interest for many in the ECEC sector.

Topics outside of inclusion that were popular included 'play and play based learning' (32.39%), 'language and literacy' (26.70%) and 'organisational topics (such as leadership, management, documentation, programming and planning, etc)' (26.70%). Four respondents submitted their own answers through 'Other (please specify)'. Their suggestions included additional inclusive practices, such as children's mental health, Autism/ADHD, child safety, as well as a mention for nature pedagogy.

To gain more insight, respondents were asked to briefly describe why they selected the 5 responses they chose for the previous question. 149 respondents provided a comment. Themes within the comments that emerged included responsiveness, confidence building and inspiration/motivation for practice.

Responsiveness to community needs referred to people who expressed wanting to know more because of the cohort they were working with, for example people chose inclusive practices because they had children in their groups with disabilities and they want to ensure those children are engaged.

A desire to build confidence in specific areas was cited by many as a reason behind their choices, whether that be in order to role-model for other staff in their services, or because they identified the areas they know are important but don't feel knowledgeable enough.

New ideas for inspiration and motivation were frequently mentioned, commonly for their pedagogical practices and programming. This ties in with previous responses that showed respondents seeking practical ideas and specific advice from PL.

Next, respondents were asked to share their documentation of PL practices and habits. The reason we asked this question of respondents was twofold, 1) we wanted to know if there were any specific elements of the PL being provided that assist in the effective documentation of PL 'hours' and 2) we wanted to know if there were popular and effective methods/systems being used that could be shared with the ECEC community. There is a lot of misunderstanding of PL in the ECEC community, for example, many people believe that it is actually called professional development (PD) despite this not being the language used by regulatory body Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). Whilst 20 hours of PL is required annually by VIT for teacher registration, there is no enforced way of documenting or 'proving' these hours. Additionally, this process does not apply to educators, who do not have a mandated number of PL hours annually. However, many workplaces have their own policies about how teachers and educators engage in and document PL. Again, this question provided respondents with a comment box, and 144 of the 221 respondents provided answers.

Most of the respondents who left a comment had a regular system they were using, although the details of each system were significantly different. People kept logs, either via text documents, spreadsheets or diaries, and others used certificates of attendance to track the topics and time of PL. A small number said they use the VIT portal to record their PD, which is recommended by VIT but not mandatory, although several respondents expressed this is quite time-consuming. AGECS could consider making specialised Certificates of Attendance that clearly state the topic, the hours, key learnings, links to teacher standards, and a reflective prompt which could be fillable by attendees and act as proof of PL for VIT registration auditing purposes.

Table 3.6 displays the considerations respondents made when engaging with and evaluating PL, based on their role in the workplace. Respondents were encouraged to choose as many options as were applicable to them. 173 respondents selected 832 options, indicating an average of roughly five choices per person.

This suggests that survey respondents take a holistic approach to considering PL, which is corroborated by spread of high percentages across all of the options. The original intention of this question was to discern if people's roles in their workplace affected their choice of PL. Whilst information on that is not clear from the responses gathered, this question has provided the AGECS Council with a guideline of what appears to be important to ECEC teachers and educators when engaging with PL. Particularly, tools are still at the forefront of what survey respondents are identifying as important, and in addition they have also flagged PL that challenges existing understandings and perspectives (79.19%), or that introduces new ideas and concepts (72.25%), as of high importance.

Again, 4 respondents selected 'Other (please specify)' and shared that building capacity of staff or building capacity of families was also a consideration when choosing PL. One offered '*gaining knowledge, resources, experience, and different strategies… These four elements make up a teacher's wealth*' which nicely captures the purpose of PL.

Table 3.6– Considerations for engaging with PL, based on role, of survey respondents 2023

Considerations	Responses	
Challenges my existing understandings and perspective	79.19%	137
Consolidates/reinforces my existing knowledge	57.23%	99
Gives me tools I can use in my practice	82.08%	142
Provides directions or ideas for my practice	60.69%	105
Stimulates reflection	63.58%	110
Supports me to introduce and explain concepts and practices to my colleagues	63.58%	110
Teaches me new concepts to be aware of	72.25%	125
Other (please specify)	2.31%	4
Answered		**173**
Skipped		**48**

The final questions in this section related to survey respondents' feelings of professional wellbeing. Professional wellbeing was included in the survey as a direct result of the strategic planning AGECS Council undertook in 2022. This stemmed from Council's observations of the stress that the ECEC workforce was experiencing prior to and because of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Professional wellbeing is a relatively new concept in ECEC, and as such there is not a lot of community awareness. As a result of this, it was important to the sub-committee constructing the survey to not mislead any survey respondents into misconstruing AGECS's ability to respond to personal wellbeing issues, or to cause any emotional distress. Instead, it was opted to provide three general categories, and ask respondents to rank them in importance in regard to their feelings of professional wellbeing. This is visible in chart 3.7.

Chart 3.7 - Ranked outcomes of professional learning, in terms of how much they impact sense of professional wellbeing.
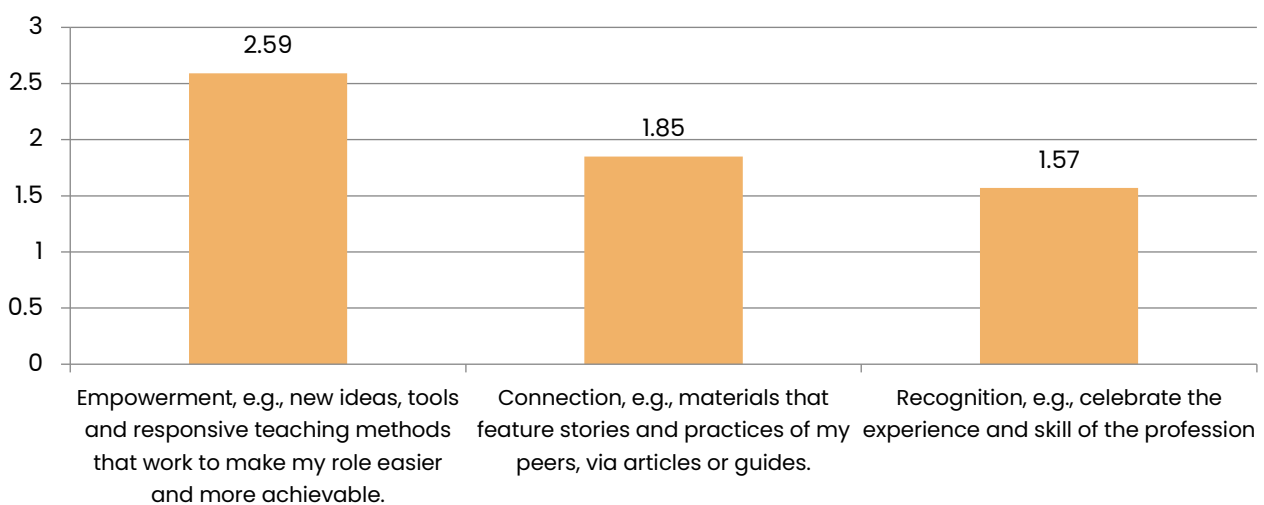
Following this question, survey respondents were given the opportunity to share any comments they had on their own professional wellbeing. This time 49 respondents offered responses, although several of these comments were people responding 'no comment'. The themes from the

more detailed responses emerged as connection, respect, vulnerability and workload expectations, and each of the themes were enmeshed with one another.

Connections had many different meanings to respondents. It referred to relationships with colleagues and with families, and relationships between schools and ECEC services. It also referred to relationships between teachers and educators across different ECEC services. Connections also linked closely with respect, particularly respect of the role of ECEC teachers and educators, who are experiencing an increased workload and a perceived increase in the number of children and families they are working with who are experiencing vulnerability. This was a complex question, so it is unsurprising that there were complex responses. Whilst AGECS is limited in what provisions can be created to address these concerns, it is valuable to have these insights to inform decision-making, particularly in terms of the role of PL and how it can support professional wellbeing rather than be a contributor to stressors that decrease feelings of professional wellbeing.

What is very clear in the responses to these questions is that the ECEC workforce is a professional workforce, and one which is proud of its role and understands its importance to children, families and the broader community. The most popular response to enablers of professional wellbeing, seen in Chart 3.7, was to feel empowered to be even more skilled at their role, showing that professional capabilities are of the highest importance to ECEC teachers and educators.

This section sought information from survey respondents on their interests and preferences for PL content, materials and resources based on predetermined scope of capacity of AGECS as an organisation, particularly, an organisation run by a volunteer Council which is supported by three part-time contractors.

This section showed that the survey respondents were more interested in live (online) events, pre-recorded seminars, and practice guides as PL formats. Across the board, there was a keen interest in clear, practical, and specific instruction, advice and support, specifically tools. Respondents expressed an interest in reflection, and in interest in improved practice both to support their own professional wellbeing, but also to best help children, families and colleagues. This suggests that PL that is 'packaged' together, in the sense that a live-event or pre-recorded seminar may have associated tools and reflective exercises, could be an avenue that the AGECS Council follows.

Specific content topics were shared, and the trend was towards inclusion and diversity, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives being the most popular option. AGECS has already developed the Reconciliation series, and this feedback will go to the RAP Committee who may wish to advise AGECS Council on plans for more or new resources in this area.

Additionally, several members of the AGECS Council have shared value and expertise in inclusive practices in the recent past, indicating that Council can be a PL resource for AGECS's generation of content for members. This is potentially an effective and efficient way to start generating new PL in 2024 due to access and costs.

It is important at this point to recall that the demographic information of those responding to the survey, was not reflective of the ECEC community, particularly in regard to age and experience. This suggests that whilst their insights are valuable, there is also a necessity for some trial and error in

the provision of PL materials that might help younger, less experienced teachers and educators, and those who are living outside of metropolitan areas. This is more likely to affect the format of PL, rather than the content of PL.

This is the end of questions that sought answers form respondents about PL. The next section provides an insight into survey respondents' opinions and preferences on non-PL provisions, resources and opportunities that AGECS has the scope to offer.

4. *Additional activities and resources*

This section briefly discusses the findings from the survey that pertain to the current and potential non-PL offerings of AGECS. This final set of survey questions was described to respondents as 'Other activities'. As with the PL offerings, AGECS Council had a predetermined scope of what could practicably be offered to the ECEC community.

Table 4.1 displays the non-PL items of interest of survey respondents. Respondents were not explicitly encouraged to select as many options as were applicable, but they could have selected multiple options. Of the 138 respondents to this question, there were 343 responses, giving an average of 2.5 responses per person.

Table 4.1– Non-PL items of interest of survey respondents 2023		
Items of interest	Responses	
Applying for Fellowship Program for Leadership and Change grants	42.75%	59
Applying for mini-grants	63.04%	87
Receiving awards	21.01%	29
Receiving certificates of recognition (for achievement or practice)	39.86%	55
Sharing my professional knowledge through creating content for other AGECS members (support by AGECS Council)	28.99%	40
Sharing stories of personal practice for AGECS publications (such as AUDAX)	32.61%	45
Writing articles for AGECS publications (such as AUDAX)	20.29%	28
	Answered	**138**
	Skipped	**83**

Monetary funding appeared to be the most sought-after non-PL activity, with the two most popular options amongst survey respondents being mini-grants (63.04%) and Fellowship Program for Leadership and Change grants (42.75%). There is a precedence for mini-grants, which were offered during the 100 Years of AGECS Anniversary celebrations, bringing in new members and providing PL content in the form of articles to AUDAX. The Fellowship Program for Leadership and Change has been running for almost a decade. The discrepancy between the two grants suggests that the Fellowship Program for Leadership and Change is not as desirable for ECEC teachers and educators, who may be after less funding for a shorter project turnaround that has fewer requirements.

Certificates of recognition were the third most popular option, which is something AGECS currently does not offer. This may be a project for AGECS Council to consider planning and implementing, separate to PL materials. This would include determining what practices would be recognised, and

a process for endorsing recognition for services and/or practitioners.

Respondents also showed an interest in sharing stories of their own practice (32.61%), but not as interested in writing more formal 'articles' (20.29%). This indicates AGECS Council should develop a plan for how to manage member-sourced contributions, and the extent to which AGECS support members in conceptualising their stories, writing their stories, etc.

Table 3.2– AGECS publications and channels of interest of survey respondents 2023		
Publications of interest	Responses	
AUDAX (biannual digital journal) that features articles from researchers and practitioners, recommendations for practice, and more)	53.01%	88
inForm (monthly online newsletter) that features news stories, links to free events and resources, AGECS updates and link to research surveys	78.31%	130
Facebook – where we share resources, news, reminders and informative posts	63.86%	106
Instagram – where we share resources, news, reminders and informative posts	29.52%	49
LinkedIn– where we share resources, news, reminders and informative posts	14.46%	24
Answered		**166**
Skipped		**55**

Table 3.2 displays the interest survey respondents had in AGECS publications and social media channels. This was to ensure that AGECS Council can make knowledgeable decisions on where to direct energy, hours and budget with the outputs that do not directly assist AGECS in achieving its charitable objectives, particularly social media.

From table 3.2 it is evident that both AGECS publications are perceived as worthwhile by a significant proportion of the respondents, with inForm overall being the most popular AGECS output with 78.31% of respondents selecting it, but AUDAX still being valued by over half of the respondents (53.01%). Both of these publications have been consistently produced by AGECS, so it is positive to see them both receive interest from survey respondents, and reinforces the continuation of both publications, separately.

In terms of social media, the AGECS Facebook account is the preferred channel. However, Instagram still has a significant proportion of respondents who are interested in it. Again, for questions such as this one, any decisions that are made as a result of this information also need to consider the missing demographics from the survey respondents, in this case the lack of younger ECEC teachers and educators, which has an impact on which social media channels are used more, or which non-social media channels would be preferred.

The final two questions sought comments from respondents regarding interest in active AGECS membership, and then a general request for final comments for the AGECS Council. 77 survey respondents offered a comment on becoming more active AGECS members, although a number

of these were simple yes/no responses. The comments that were collected referred to a number of factors, which will be helpful for seeking collaboration with members, but also for AGECS to keep in mind when marketing itself as a brand, as a membership organisation and as a provider of PL.

A number of participants stated they were currently undertaking further study, but would like to be more involved with AGECS once their study commitments were finished. This appeared to be for two reasons, 1) time constraints and 2) not feeling confident enough in their current skillset to be able to contribute. In fact, time constraints were the main factor cited impeding respondents from being more active AGECS members, by those who would otherwise be interested in contributing more.

Of those who expressed a desire to be more involved with AGECS, the trend seemed to be that they were interested in being more active but did not specify how this would look. Some mentioned writing articles, sharing information, building a network and joining Council, but most simply expressed that they were interested. However, this does suggest that AGECS Council can seek contributions from members for articles or for joining committees, and there will be some response. Based on information from table 3.2, Facebook and inForm appear to the most effective channels for seeking input or interaction from members.

Finally, 44 respondents provided some final comments in the last question of the survey, which stated 'Do you have any final ideas, comments or suggestions for the AGECS Council?'. Again, there were a number of people who left a comment that stated 'no' in response to this question, or left a 'thank you' aimed at Council. Of the detailed comments, there were some general ideas and some specific ideas. As these were very broad and covered a range of topics, they are summarised and listed below:

a) When sharing professional learning, it should be clear who the learning is aimed at, e.g. graduate teachers, experienced teachers, etc.
b) There should be training/PL for the gamut of ECEC qualifications and roles, not just aimed at teachers and teacher-qualified staff.
c) An emphasis on mature aged teachers and educators, and student-teachers/educators
d) AGECS needs to market itself better. This may be directly contacting ECEC chains, or by asking our network to share AGECS more broadly.
e) Expressions of excitement or gratitude for connections that may be generated from the actions of Council following the review of the findings.
f) Gratitude for the inclusion of babies and toddlers, and PL pertaining to this age group.
g) Dissatisfaction in the current rating and assessment process by ACECQA. Although this point is not something that AGECS has the capacity to focus on, it is important to share the responses from passionate survey respondents. It also highlights that AGECS can act as a 'fact sharer' and empower early childhood professionals to learn about processes, systems, and legislation.

Whilst AGECS Council is not required to act on any single comment, the responses to this final section of the survey show that the survey respondents held varied interests and views.

This final section has highlighted that the non-PL provisions that foster a sense of connection and community are highly appreciated, particularly publications inForm and AUDAX and Facebook. It also reiterated that the grant opportunities are important to and valued by the ECEC community, particularly mini-grants, or grants that do not require extensive work but help to fund smaller, more immediate or less 'big picture' projects. Whilst this may not be practical for AGECS to provide and budget for every year, it is worth discussing how something might be implemented every second year or for other special occasions.

Conclusion

A lot of data has been discussed in this report on the findings of the AGECS Community Engagement and Consultation Survey 2023. Split into four sections of demographics, current PL behaviours and perspectives, PL interests and preferences, and non-PL activities and resources, this report has provided insights for the AGECS Council to factor in when planning PL provisions within the scope of the wider AGECS Strategic Plan 2022-2027.

Demographically, it is important for Council to remember that young and less experienced educators' and teachers' perspectives have not been proportionately captured in this survey. This also applies to remote and rural teachers and educators. OSHC and FDC were not represented in the survey at all, which suggests that this is not a demographic that AGECS caters to. It appears that the main characteristics of respondents includes staff at sessional stand-alone kindergartens, and those holding degree qualifications and to a lesser extent diploma qualifications. Given this engagement already exists, it suggests AGECS should focus primarily on PL for degree qualified teachers and diploma qualified educators. Additionally, casual relief staff were highlighted in this survey as a group that often are overlooked. Promoting our free resources and minimal cost membership to casual relievers, who often have to pay for PL out of their own pocket, might be a direction to follow.

In terms of provision of PL, the findings suggest that a multimodal approach will generate the most engagement with the most people. This may involve continuing the current method of taking live-events and uploading the recordings and a transcript, but this also means that live events are not necessary for all seminar content – some content can be pre-recorded and directly uploaded to the website. Although the results are not definitive in what will work, they did indicate options that AGECS should not pursue including podcasts, drop-in Zoom sessions, printable resources, and infographics, as these were all resoundingly disliked by respondents.

In addition to PL 'seminars', respondents made a clear request for practical information, including practice guides and other tools, such as templates. Respondents also showed a responsiveness to reflective practice, which lends itself to be a potential overarching theme or current though AGECS's provisions of PL. As well as confirming the PL content and approach, the AGECS Council also needs to determine the frequency of the PL output. A full timeline should be developed in early 2024 that combines approach, content and schedule.

With these two approaches to PL in mind, the most popular topics of interest were all themed around inclusion, equity and diversity. This may be a good jumping off point for a series, or it may be that AGECS Council chooses to focus on a wide range of topics based in this space. Additionally,

the most popular response was 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives', indicating that the RAP Committee may be interested in proposing PL ideas for AGECS members to Council.

The survey also highlighted that AGECS does not only need to provide PL, but that PL also needs to be marketed. An effective way to do this is to increase AGECS name recognition, as many survey respondents report sourcing PL related information from familiar ECEC bodies, such as ECA, and many respondents also shared to having not have heard of AGECS prior to participating in the survey. In order to reach as many ECEC community members as possible, AGECS may need to consider some advertising or relationship building with organisations, either long day care franchises/chains, casual relief providers, universities and TAFES, or existing volunteer community networks.

Additionally, survey respondents highlighted in-person conferences and network meetings as places they seek information on or learn about PL opportunities. This is not to suggest AGECS has to run conferences or network meetings, but instead finding a way to connect with existing conferences and network meetings is an opportunity to both engage with the ECEC community and raise name awareness. This is one of the recommendations for a project for AGECS Council to work on.

This report has identified multiple key themes and aspects of what some ECEC teachers and educators are seeking from both PL, but also from an ECEC body more broadly. This report is one of the many elements that when put together form the AGECS strategic mission for the next few years, and should interpreted as such. Particularly, this report should be read in conjunction with the Early Childhood Professional and AGECS Member Profile report and the AGECS Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027.

References

Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies [AGECS] (2023), 'The Early Childhood Professional and AGECS Membership Profile Report', AGECS website, accessed 8 January 2024.

Department of Education, Skills and Employment (17 August 2022), '2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census State and Regional Data Table', Department of Education website, accessed 8 January 2024.