

Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program

Application Guidelines 2026

Applications close 16 November 2026

Please read these guidelines carefully before and when you complete your application.



Contents

Application Guidelines 2026	1
Contents.....	2
Introduction	3
Aim	3
Program details	3
Eligibility criteria.....	4
What funds can be used for	5
What funds cannot be used for.....	5
Assessment of applications	5
Accepting your offer.....	6
Submission of applications.....	7
When to submit your application	7
How to submit your application.....	7



Introduction

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to establish the National Quality Framework (NQF) for early childhood education and care (ECEC). Australia-wide implementation of the NQF commenced in January 2012.

Since then, the ACT Government has been working closely with the ECEC sector to manage the ongoing changes, with particular attention being given to the changes in qualification requirements for early childhood educators as part of the NQF.

To support the sector's commitment to continuous improvement under the NQF and against the National Quality Standard (NQS), the ACT Government allocated recurrent funding to the Education Directorate for the establishment of the Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program (the Program).

In 2014-15, the first 25 scholarships were awarded and in 2015-16 and 2016-17 a further 50 were offered. During 2017 an evaluation was conducted on the success of the Program and a decision was made to change the structure to provide increased levels of funding to a smaller number of applicants.

Aim

The aim of the Program is to offer financial assistance for gaining an approved early childhood degree qualification to individuals who are working in the ACT non-government ECEC sector.

In particular, the Program aims to encourage individuals to improve their skills for the benefit of the children they educate and care for, and to contribute to the continuing implementation of the NQF in the ACT.

The Program will also provide one identified position for an applicant from an underrepresented group, such as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, or with a disability.

By providing an incentive to individuals to undertake higher level professional development, the Program aims to contribute to an increase in the number of degree-qualified educators in the ACT and to raise the profile of the ECEC sector in the ACT.

Educators with an early childhood degree will benefit from improved employment outcomes, career opportunities and pedagogical knowledge.

Program details

The 2026 Program structure will include funding of up to \$25,000 per scholarship, to be reimbursed at 25 per cent per year over 4 years for full-time students, or at 12.5 per cent over 8 years for part-time students. The student will be reimbursed for the eligible expenses through the approved scholarship funding.

Employers may choose to contribute equally to the funding of the Program, which would enable more enrolments each year.

The Program requires the student, the employer, and the ACT Government to enter into an agreement (Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program Deed) which outlines a commitment from the student to complete the Program of study, the nature of support and professional

development to be provided by the employer, and the agreed pay and conditions for each year of the Program, including post-graduation.

The agreement includes:

- an obligation for the student to work for an approved non-government provider during the term of the scholarship and for a minimum period of 2 years post-graduation;
- details about circumstances and means for parties to cease the agreement with no detriment to any party;
- an option to provide \$4,000 to be used to assist employers to backfill the student while they undertake the practicum components of their study elsewhere

The deed must be signed by all three parties once a letter of offer has been received by the applicant. The signed deed must be returned to the Program Manager within 14 days of receipt of the letter of offer.

Students will be required to provide evidence of successful completion of an early childhood degree qualification to the Program Manager to avoid repayment of funding.

The Program is managed by Children's Education Care Assurance (CECA) in the ACT Education Directorate.

For additional details about any aspects of the Program, please contact the Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program Coordinator by email at ceca@act.gov.au.

Eligibility criteria

Individuals are eligible candidates for a scholarship if they:

- are an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- work in a non-government, non- school ECEC service in the ACT
- work in an approved ECEC service that under the National Regulations require early childhood teaching qualified staff
- are working towards, or are intending to enrol in, an ACECQA-approved early childhood teaching degree course either full or part-time.

Priority will be given to those who are undertaking or intending to study degree focused on early childhood teaching (0-5 years) in line with our commitment to supporting the early childhood workforce.

Applicants intending to enrol in an approved course must do so within 6 months of receiving the offer of scholarship. If not, the applicant will be advised in writing that their scholarship has been withdrawn.

Individuals who have completed part of their approved early childhood teaching degree course are eligible to apply for scholarship funding for the remaining years of their course for a maximum of 4 consecutive years.

Individuals who have received financial support for their studies in the past or are currently receiving such support are still eligible to apply for a scholarship under the Program provided there is no duplication of funding purpose or source.

Individuals are NOT eligible for a scholarship if they:

- work in a government school or school
- are not an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- do not intend to work in a non-government, non-school ECEC service in the ACT
- want to use the scholarship for a post-graduate qualification and already have an ACECQA approved early childhood teaching qualification.

What funds can be used for

Examples of expenditure proposals that will be considered for scholarship funding include:

- reimbursement of course fees for early childhood teaching (0-5 years) degree
- reimbursement of purchased leave for study release or attendance at classes or residential schools
- purchase of course-required materials, equipment, textbooks and other learning aids
- purchase of learning support services such as tutoring

Changes to proposed expenditure items/services can be negotiated, e.g. if those earmarked for later years no longer meet the needs of the scholarship recipient.

What funds cannot be used for

Examples of expenditure proposals that will not be considered for funding include:

- retrospective costs for progress already made towards an early childhood teaching degree qualification
- costs for postgraduate qualifications where the educator already holds an ACECQA approved early childhood teaching qualification
- assets such as computers
- proposals for funding more appropriately available from other sources. (Other proposals for expenditure may be excluded on a case-by-case basis).

Assessment of applications

In the first instance, the Program Coordinator will assess all applications for scholarship funding to ensure that they meet all eligibility criteria as detailed above and:

- include evidence of existing or intended enrolment in an approved early childhood teaching qualification or bridging program as per the list published at www.acecqa.gov.au

- include a detailed expenditure proposal for the purchase of approved goods and/or services up to \$6,250 per year for a maximum of \$25,000 over 4 consecutive years for full-time students, or up to \$3,125 per year over 8 years for part-time students.
- include a letter from the applicant's employer, supporting the application.
- include copies of all relevant documentation requested in Application Checklist and attach evidence of certification to the application.

Applications will be evaluated by an independent Assessment Panel to determine each application's merit and rank them against the following additional criteria:

- the applicant's description of how the items/services proposed for scholarship funding will support working towards a university qualification.
- the level of support and any financial contribution to be provided by the applicants' employer
- the applicant's supporting statement (up to 300 words) about how gaining a university qualification will contribute to the implementation of the NQF and enhance the educator's skills and knowledge in educating and caring for children.

The supporting statement is an opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their commitment to ECEC and their understanding of the value of an early childhood teaching degree and the nature and importance of the NQF.

Applicants may be invited to attend an interview with the Assessment Panel, which will provide another opportunity for the applicant to demonstrate their commitment to completing their study and contributing to the ECEC sector.

Employers are encouraged to attend the interview with the applicant.

The Assessment Panel's decision will be final.

Applicants will be advised in writing of funding decisions as soon as practicable after the closing date for the funding round.

Potential applicants are advised that the number of applications may exceed the number of available scholarships; therefore, not all applications will be successful even if they meet all the eligibility requirements, applicants may also be offered partial funding for their studies.

Accepting your offer

Successful applicants will be sent a Letter of Offer, which will include the amount of funding to be offered and the Early Childhood Degree Scholarship Program Deed (Deed). The Deed must be signed by all parties within 14 days of receiving it for the offer to be accepted.

By accepting the scholarship, the recipient will be required to abide by the terms and conditions set out in the Letter of Offer and the Deed, including:

- maintaining accurate records, e.g. course details and expenditure
- presenting receipts for purchased approved goods and services for reimbursement by the ACT Education Directorate

- providing documentary evidence of progress and continuing enrolment (if applicable) in their studies to qualify for each financial year's allocation of their scholarship funding until the final instalment
- advising the Program Coordinator of any changes to study and/or personal details
- notifying the Program Coordinator of completion of course.

Additional details about the terms and conditions of accepting a scholarship will be provided to successful applicants with their Letter of Offer.

Submission of applications

When to submit your application

- Applications open 19 October 2026
- Application close 16 November 2026

Note: Applications received after the closing date will not be considered.

How to submit your application

- Answer all questions in the spaces provided (or on additional pages if required) and complete the Application Checklist to ensure you have included all required documents
- Email your application to the Program Coordinator at ceca@act.gov.au