

Tuesday, 15 August 2023

Fair Work Commission hears first application for Multi-Employer Bargaining

WHEN: 9am Wednesday 16 August 2023

WHERE: Fair Work Commission, 11 Exhibition St, Melbourne

WHAT: Today the Fair Work Commission will commence hearing early years educators' application to bargain across employers in the ECEC sector.

This is the first Multi-Employer Bargaining application of its kind in Australia.

WHO: ACTU President Michele O'Neil and early childhood educators will be available for comment.

Quotes attributable to Sarah Gardner, Deputy Director Early Education, United Workers Union:

"Today educators are excited to be at the Fair Work Commission for their application to be heard for the first time. Educators are seeking a 25% increase to wages to save their sector and be paid the living wage they deserve.

"For the first time, 65 employers from across the country will come together to set a new standard for more than 500 centres, covering educators, teachers and other staff in the same agreement.

"Educators will not wait any longer. They are ready to sit down with employers and the government to put their claim for a 25% wage increase. Educators want to hear directly from the government that they will come to the table as soon as they can, prepared to fund a wage increase.

"Getting wages moving in early education is urgent, and stakeholders across the sector all agree. That's why this application has the support of educators, families, employers and unions.

"Educators and employers alike see every day how the staffing crisis is affecting children and families: limiting their access to early learning because services simply cannot afford to offer new places, or even to close existing rooms on a weekly basis, because they cannot find the staff to meet mandated ratios.

"This application is about making the change the sector desperately needs.

"The sooner that educators can get their authorisation to bargain with their employers and the government, the sooner we can stem the tide of burnt-out, exhausted and frustrated educators leaving the sector. The crisis in the sector must be addressed for the sake of educators, children and the economy."

Quotes attributable to Michele O’Neil, ACTU President:

“Today the Full Bench of the Fair Work Commission will hear the UJU, IEU and AEU’s application for an authorisation for supported bargaining in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. This is a historic day in the first ever Multi Employer Bargaining process in this country.

“This Agreement will be the first of its kind and stands to drastically improve the lives of thousands of educators.

“There has been strong cooperation from across the early learning sector to start this process and urgently fix the crisis in the sector. That’s why during this hearing, the Fair Work Commission will hear unions, employers and government all support bargaining.

“This case will for the first time provide educators the opportunity to be part of genuine negotiations with the decision makers at the table. They will sit down in their unions with employers and with government as the funder of their sector.

“For years educators’ real wages have gone backward, forcing them to leave the job they love to put food on the table for their own families in this cost-of-living crisis.

“Lifting educator wages is crucial to recognise the value of their work and put a stop to the workforce crisis that is devastating the sector.”

Quotes attributable to Carol Matthews, Independent Education Union Australia NSW/ACT Branch Deputy Secretary:

“University qualified early childhood teachers are essential to achieve high quality early childhood education and care. However, four-year university trained ECEC teachers in some long day care centres are only paid modern award rates.

“This means they could be earning \$20,000 a year less than schoolteachers with the same qualifications.

“Unsurprisingly, there continues to be a crippling workforce shortage in the sector, which is even worse than the teacher shortage in schools. New teacher graduates overwhelmingly choose to work in primary schools rather than early childhood education and care, because of the differential in pay and conditions. The 65 employers participating in this application nationally (with the three unions) want to pursue an enterprise agreement under the new supported bargaining stream. This is a historic step in utilising the new provisions and the IEU is optimistic that it will lead to improved pay outcomes for early childhood teachers.”

Quote attributed to Meredith Peace, AEU Victorian Branch President:

Early childhood teachers and educators deserve improvements in pay and conditions that reflect the value of the important role they play in the education and development of children.

“Our nation’s early education workforce deserves better. A 25% wage increase will ensure that early childhood teachers and educators are compensated fairly for the critical work they do and will help address the current workforce shortages the sector faces.”

“Improving wages for early childhood teachers is essential to retain and attract teachers and educators in the early childhood sector, to deliver high quality education and care, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of our nation’s early childhood education system.

“The AEU is part of this joint application to the Fair Work Commission so that bargaining with employers and the government can commence and deliver real and substantial wage increases for early childhood teachers and educators who have been neglected for too long.

Quote attributable to Ashley Fretton, Melbourne educator:

“Early childhood educators’ wages have stayed too low for way too long - and educators just can’t afford to stay in a sector that doesn’t value them anymore. We are sick of being taken for granted. We need a wage that reflects our value and allows us to pay bills and provide for our own families.

“The government needs to acknowledge this crisis properly. We need a new system to fund early childhood education and care. A 25% wage increase would mean that centres could stop experienced staff leaving, and we could fill the huge number of vacancies across the sector. Most of all, it would help to stop the burn-out and stress that is piling on top of educators every week.

“It’s time to listen to educators and to pay us a living wage.”

Quotes attributable to Julie Price, Community Child Care Association Executive Director:

“Highly skilled and qualified educators are the backbone of our early education sector, yet they are still paid below average wages and less than workers in similar jobs.

“Paying minimum wage does not produce a professional early education and care workforce. Multi-employer bargaining is the best way to ensure early education is seen as a career of choice, and recognised for its value to children, families and our society.

“Children deserve highly trained educators and teachers to give them the best start in life. Our educators deserve to be professionally paid and valued for the important work they do.”

Quotes attributable to Kim Bertino, Chief Executive Officer, Big Fat Smile:

“Big Fat Smile believes that our teachers and educators should receive wages comparable to schools that reflect the crucial role they play in children’s learning and development. But as a high quality not for profit provider we can’t afford to pay that, and neither should our families have to through increased fees. With the Government at the bargaining table, we hope that a decent funded wage increase for early childhood teachers and educators can be achieved.”

ENDS

Media Contact: Gareth Hathway 0499 878 782