

Monday 23 September 2024

Fair Work Commission authorises bargaining for staff in over 100 preschools

In a ground-breaking decision, the Fair Work Commission has today granted the IEU's application for an authorisation to bargain for pay rises for teachers and educators in more than 100 preschools from across NSW.

The IEU represents 32,000 teachers and support staff in NSW and the ACT, including in early childhood education and care centres.

This application is only the third of its kind to be granted under the new 'supported bargaining' stream. It is designed to assist employers and employees who haven't been able to bargain successfully at the individual enterprise level to now bargain together as a group. This process is crucial to sectors with a high proportion of female workers, such as early childhood education and care.

Following today's decision of the Fair Work Commission, unions will commence bargaining with 103 preschools from across NSW.

"Community preschools are crying out for teachers – their work has been undervalued for far too long and this must be fixed through salaries that are comparable with teachers in schools," said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

Preschools provide high-quality early childhood education to many children throughout NSW, laying the foundations for success at school and lifelong learning.

The bargaining process will enable the union, the NSW government (the primary funding provider for preschools) and preschools to bargain together to lift pay and conditions across the sector. The preschools, which are run by voluntary parent committees of mums and dads, will be represented by Community Early Learning Australia (CELA).

"We look forward to sitting down with the NSW government and CELA at the bargaining table to address the workforce crisis in NSW preschools," Matthews said.

"We need urgent action to support early childhood teachers and educators who do such critical work every day in educating our youngest children.

"We're calling for a 25% increase for beginning teachers and more for experienced preschool teachers. In other states and territories, preschool teachers receive pay rates comparable to school teachers." Currently in NSW:

- **Beginning preschool teachers:** earn just \$70,045 a year under the applicable modern award, while their colleagues in schools are paid \$85,000 a year.
- **Experienced preschool teachers:** under the modern award, the top rate for an experienced teacher is \$90,134 per year. In comparison, a teacher with the same level of experience working in a NSW government school is paid \$122,100 a year.

A win would help narrow the gender pay gap. "A successful outcome would be a game changer," Matthews said. "Teachers, children, parents and the wider community will all gain from a stronger preschool sector."

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

Authorised by Carol Matthews, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary