

Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee (IRC)
Industry Summary

Part A – IRC Details

Name of the IRC
Children's Education and Care
IRC members
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Part B – Industry Details

Industry areas (1,000 words, include attachments where relevant)
<p><i>Overview of industry sectors / sub-sectors covered by the IRC, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>employers (size, local/state/national/global, government/not-for-profit/for-profit, key enterprises)</i> • <i>key links with other industries and cross-sectoral work</i> <p>The Children's Education and Care (CEC) sector provides education, care and support to children under 18 years of age. The sector has a key role in supporting children's lifelong learning, development and wellbeing.</p> <p>The Children's Education and Care IRC oversees those VET Training Package Products which support the workforces across the following sub-sectors of the CEC sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood education and care (ECEC) (comprising of early childhood education and care and preschool services) • Outside school hours care (OSHC) (including vacation programs as well as before and after-school care activities for school age children) • Education support (assist teachers and support student learning mainly with students in primary or secondary schools, as defined by State/Territory legislation).

There are a vast number of international and national studies which confirm the **essential role early learning and development has on a child's social and emotional development, and long-term wellbeing**. The importance for all children to have access to high quality early education and care is a priority at both a national and state/territory policy level, with national policy settings having aimed at establishing appropriate national minimum standards and regulatory frameworks with jurisdictions. Some of these national strategies and initiatives for ECEC include:¹

- National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (2008 – 2021)
- Preschool Reform Funding Agreement (2022 – 2025)
- National Quality Framework (NQF) for Early Childhood Education and Care
- Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia
- National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022 – 2031).

Demand for children's education and care services is significant, with approximately **1.3 million children** from 1 million families attending a Child Care Subsidy approved education and care service (June quarter 2021).² Just over 782,700 children were attending centre-based services³ and 486,120 were in OSHC. Demand has been increasing steadily since the previous year (1.178 million children were using education and care services in the September 2020 quarter) however the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions had a significant impact on the sector. Many families in response to the lockdowns and restrictions imposed to minimise the impact of COVID on the community chose to withdraw their child from formal care arrangements. For example, before COVID, 52% of 0-13 year olds were in approved or formal education and care services compared to 26% during May – June 2020.⁴ Education and care policy as a result changed swiftly to support the fall in demand and prevent wide-spread service closures for more than 1,100 centre-based services closed due to the impact of COVID-10 (as recorded in the NQA ITS for the start of April 2020).⁵ Measures implemented included a Relief Package, the Transition Payment and the Recovery Package.

The Children's Education and Care workforce

At the time of writing, the 2021 National Workforce Census data was not available.⁶ The **2016 Census data shows that nearly 195,000 staff**⁷ were employed in the ECEC sector with more than half (55.7%) employed in long day care services. Fourteen per cent were employed in OSHC and 12.1% in vacation care. The workforce is predominantly female (91.1%) and the median age for female workers is 34 years. Most educators hold a Certificate III and Diploma qualifications.

The ECEC workforce employed in family day care (FDC) more than doubled since the 2013 Census was conducted, and the continued growth in demand for services will mean that for 2021, the workforce size is expected to demonstrate further growth as indicated by forecast data below.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2022) *Australia's Children* [Available at:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/education/child-learning-development>]

² Australian Government Department of Education. Child Care in Australia report June quarter 2021 [Available at: <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/early-childhood-data-and-reports/quarterly-reports/child-care-australia-report-june-quarter-2021>]

³ A centre-based service is an education and care service other than a family day care service. This includes most long day care, preschool and outside school hours care services that are delivered at a centre. It does not include preschools in Tasmania or Western Australia out of scope of the NQF, as well as other services that aren't regulated under the National Law.

⁴ Australian Government Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) Towards COVID normal. Report no. 3 Child care in 2020 Child care (June 2021) [Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/towards-covid-normal-child-care>]

⁵ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) NQF Snapshot Q1 2022 (released May 2022) [Available at: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-05/NQF%20Snapshot%20Q1%202022%20FINAL.pdf>]

⁶ Australian Government Department of Education. National Workforce Census [Available at: <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/early-childhood-data-and-reports/national-workforce-census>]

⁷ This total may include some double counting of staff with more than one part-time position

Educator roles in the CEC sector include (note terminology relating to these roles can vary):

- Early childhood (pre-primary school) teacher
- Kindergarten teacher
- Preschool aide
- Early childhood educator
- Educator
- Family day care educator
- Out of school hours care educator and
- Education and care centre managers.

Note that VET qualifications are the minimum requirements for educators working in the CEC sector. The minimum qualification level for a teacher in Australia is a bachelor's degree.

Labour force data available from the Australian Government's National Skills Commission (NSC) shows that across different job roles in the CEC sector, strong growth is projected:⁸

- 134,200 educators*(ANZSCO ID 4211) in 2021 and it is forecast to rise to 142,100 by 2026. This figure includes approximately:
 - 96,300 child care workers (ANZSCO ID 421111)
 - 14,000 family day care workers (ANZSCO ID 421112)
 - 8,600 out of school hours care workers (ANZSCO ID 421114)
- 49,300 early childhood (pre-primary school) teachers (ANZSCO ID 2411) in 2021 and 59,900 by 2026
- 15,300* education and care centre managers (ANZSCO ID 1341) in 2021 and 18,700 by 2026.

*Note: * Data collection and reporting for job roles is conducted according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCOs). ANZSCO IDs currently refer to these job roles as child carers and childcare centre managers. While policy and data collections use the term 'childcare', industry terminology and recognition of roles has evolved significantly, and the term 'education and care' is considered more accurate and better reflects tasks and responsibilities of the workforce. At the time of preparing this summary, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was running a public consultation to review the ANZSCO classifications. The figures throughout this summary are presented to provide an indicative account of the workforce size and nature supported by the VET Training Package.*

The CEC workforce is significant, and the COVID-19 pandemic experience highlighted the fundamental role workers in the sector have in our society. Like many health professionals, workers in the CEC sector were regarded as 'essential' workers during the COVID-19 lockdowns as they continued to go to work, in high-risk settings, and provide key education and care services for children of families in other essential job roles across health, education and community services.

⁸ Australian Government National Skills Commission (NSC) Occupation Profiles – various occupations and ANZSCO IDs [Available at: <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/>]

Employer landscape

The service provider environment across Australia is diverse and extensive.

The latest data available at the time of writing shows that across Australia there are **16,884 CEC services** approved under the NQF (Quarter 1, 2022). Nearly all (97%) are centre-based service providers with only 3% representing family day care (FDC) service providers:⁹

- 8,506 Long day care (LDC)
- 4,796 Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)
- 3,071 Preschool / kindergarten
- 509 Family Day Care (FDC)
- 2 Other.

Service providers operating across the CEC sector include a range of public (state/territory and local government) and private (for-profit and not-for-profit), community and non-profit organisations, and public, independent and private schools spread across the country. Approximately half (51%) of service providers are private for-profit entities, 20% are private not-for-profit community managed and 13% are private not-for-profit other organisations. Service providers represent both small (35%), medium (31%) and large (34%) sized entities.

Cross-sectoral work

Overall, there is significant shared content between the CHC Community Services and HLT Health Training Packages which are reflected in the following cross sectors which are reflected in the CEC's Training Products:

- advocacy
- anatomy & physiology
- communication
- diversity
- information management
- management and leadership
- infection prevention and control
- legal and ethical practice
- policy and research
- professional practice
- oral health
- work health and safety
- first aid
- language literacy and numeracy.

Regulatory context (200 words)

Brief description of relevant industry standards, licensing or accreditation requirement

In Australia, the legislative framework is significant in the CEC sector. The National Quality Framework (NQF) introduced a new quality standard in 2012 to improve education and care across long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten, and outside school hours care services.¹⁰

The Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations govern the minimum standards and requirements that all providers of services regulated under the NQF must meet. The National Quality Standard (NQS) is then used by all state and territory regulatory authorities to assess and rate services.

Children's education and care services that operate under the NQF for ECEC include preschools / kindergartens, LDC, FDC and OSHC.

⁹ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) NQF Snapshot Q1 2022 (released May 2022) [Available at: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-05/NQF%20Snapshot%20Q1%202022%20FINAL.pdf>]

¹⁰ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework>

The Education Support roles are also critical in children’s education, and are primarily engaged in a school environment with requirements defined in State and Territory jurisdictions. These roles are not however regulated as part of the NQF.

The NQF also sets out the minimum qualification and educator to child ratio requirements for children’s education and care services.¹¹ The NQF prescribes staff to child ratios and mandates required minimum qualifications for early childhood services including LDC and FDC, as well as OSHC (in all jurisdictions excluding NSW and Tasmania). Under regulation 126 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations, ‘50% of educators are required to meet the relevant educator to child ratios in centre-based services with children preschool age and under, must have, or be actively working towards, an approved diploma level education and care qualification (or higher).’¹²

Part C – Industry Priorities

Major priorities for the industry sector (500 words)

Brief description of skills and training needs the IRC has focused on each year of the program and why these were a priority. What are the current top 3 skills priorities for the sector?

Past Skills Priorities Addressed

In 2021, the following five Qualifications and associated Units of Competency were reviewed and redeveloped:

- CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
- CHC30221 Certificate III in School Based Education Support
- CHC40221 Certificate IV in School Based Education Support
- CHC50121 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care
- CHC50221 Diploma of School Age Education and Care.

The following Qualification was also reviewed and identified for deletion:

- CHC40113 - Certificate IV in School Age Education and Care

The review of the qualifications was instigated by some of the key findings from the Australian Skills Quality Authority’s (ASQA) 2015 strategic review, *Training for early childhood education and care in Australia*.¹³ The ASQA findings revealed:

- The *CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* and *CHC50113 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* are critical qualifications for early childhood education and care workers under the sector requirements of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Most registered training organisations have difficulty complying with assessment requirements.
- Training courses are often being delivered in too short a time to enable the development of sufficient skills and knowledge and for valid assessment decisions to be made.
- Learning and assessment in a structured workplace environment are not being done well by many registered training organisations delivering early childhood education and care.

¹¹ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/qualification-requirements>

¹² Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) Qualifications for centre-based services with children preschool age or under [Available at: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/requirements/children-preschool-age-or-under>]

¹³ https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Strategic_Review_2015_Early_Childhood_Education_Report.pdf

The CEC Training Package Review project also highlighted the need to reconsider the relationship between the qualifications which cater to OSHC and ECEC, as well as education support. Job roles and related skills and knowledge requirements appeared to have shifted since the last review. The Review project was also an opportunity to clarify the education support job role and strengthen the alignment of the qualifications with contemporary skills, knowledge and responsibilities as well as recognise the growing significance of these roles in the school systems.

Please note that the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA) recently developed a new accredited course to specifically meet the needs of the OSHC sector - *10983NAT Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care*. The course was developed in response to key gaps and issues identified during the CEC Training Package Review project. The new accredited course will support educators to obtain the skills and qualifications required for employment as a qualified educator in an OSHC service. Although the accredited course is available on the national register further work with states and territories is required to support consideration of issues around subsidy eligibility and traineeship recognition. On this basis the AISC at its June 2022 meeting reconsidered the effective date for the deletion of the CHC40113 - Certificate IV in School Age Education and Care ¹⁴.

Current and Future Skills Priorities

SkillsIQ's 2022 Skills Survey, in addition with consultation with stakeholders across the CEC sector has revealed that the key skills a worker requires are those which are **specific and technical** for the role. For example, educators firstly need skills to be able to support children's learning and overall wellbeing, have knowledge of the NQF inclusive of regulations and law as well as First Aid and WHS practices when working with children.

When enquiring on non-technical skills requirements across the workforce, the top short-to-medium future skills needs identified across the CEC sector reflected a number of soft-skill areas - **communication, emotional intelligence, resilience, stress tolerance and teamwork**.

Similar soft-skill areas have been voiced by employers via the Australian Government's National Skills Commission (NSC) occupational profiles. For example, employers of educators have indicated that important skills and knowledge areas include **social perceptiveness, critical thinking, monitoring, active listening and speaking**.¹⁵

The skills gaps of the CEC sector are tiered across three levels:

- Leadership and management at a senior level – severe skill shortages exist as senior staff leave the sector or retire which consequently impacts succession planning for many centres. Senior staff leaving is also affecting the availability of mentors to support staff develop skills further. Those senior staff left are under pressure to continue delivering operations, cover absences and ensure services operate within quality and compliance requirements.
- Overall there is a small talent pool to draw on with many vacancies going unfilled for over 12 months, and so there is a need to build capacity within the sector.
- Entry-level staff – who may be employed in job roles but do not have the right skills, attributes or training.

The current educator to child ratios and minimum qualification requirements set under the Education and Care Services Regulations are challenging for service providers to meet while striving to meet all requirements and experiencing unprecedented workforce shortages and skills issues exacerbated by

¹⁴ <https://www.aisc.net.au/hub/aisc-communicate-meeting-1-june-2022>

¹⁵ Australian Government National Skills Commission Occupational Profiles: Counsellors ANZSCO ID 421111 [Available at: <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/>]

the COVID 19 pandemic. These are complex issues for service providers and regulators to navigate due to the evidence-based connection between ratios, qualifications, and service quality.

Skills shortages is a critical issue for the CEC sector. Other workforce challenges are outlined in more detail in the following section.

National qualifications not substantially updated since 2015, and where possible indicative timeframe for when they may need to be reviewed (add additional rows as necessary)

Qualification code	Qualification title	Reason	Timeframe for review
CHC40113	Certificate IV in School Age Education and Care	This qualification was to be deleted in June 2022. The AISC determined that deletion should be delayed for 6 months to 31 December 2022*	31 st December 2022

Note: *Concerns have been expressed about the impact the delay in the deletion of the qualification CHC40113 Certificate IV in School Age Care, and enabling the implementation of the new Certificate III which has been available on the national register since August 2021. The extension and current accessibility to funding will continue to enable enrolments in the Certificate IV which could be detrimental for the sector in that the deleted and redundant units in the Qualification will continue to be taught long past their expiry date. Further, there is no pathway from the CHC 40113 Certificate IV Qualification into the updated CHC50221 Diploma of School Age Education and Care or the Early Childhood Education and Care Qualifications, and this will disadvantage educators in progressing an OSHC career pathway seamlessly or a transfer to a qualification early childhood sector. The decision of the AISC to delay the deletion, was to minimise the risk of a gap in training accessibility rather than to generate ongoing uptakes in a qualification which although funded is not relevant.

Critical challenges and opportunities for this industry sector (1,000 words)

Summary of key challenges, lessons learned, and any identified opportunities (at local/state/national/global levels) related to vocational education and training, including but not limited to:

- *issues with the implementation or delivery of training*
- *challenges achieving stakeholder consensus*
- *intersections or collaboration across industry sectors.*

Industry and workforce challenges

As in other sectors, stakeholders across the CEC sector have indicated that **COVID-19 and associated restrictions, requirements and staffing impacts** has been by far the most significant workforce challenge experienced in the last 12 months, and the disruption continues to impact stakeholders. For example, it has been creating general uncertainty in the operating environment (i.e. close contact rules), and difficulties in maintaining staff motivation and ensuring mental health wellbeing as the workforce has been under extensive pressure to continue providing services in at times high risk settings (SkillsIQ's 2022 Skills Survey). As mentioned above, staff across the sector were considered 'essential workers' during the initial COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, and educators were required to continue to go to work. The sector experienced a number of funding and policy changes, especially

during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which impacted the sector significantly. The Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package implemented during April to July 2020 involved suspending Child Care Subsidy payments and in return for funding, services were required to remain open, not charge fees to families and give priority to children of essential workers, vulnerable/disadvantaged children and children enrolled before the package was introduced.¹⁶ Federal Government support payments such as Job Keeper were withdrawn for the sector's educators early on in the pandemic (i.e. July 2020). Despite the critical role that educators have in teaching and caring for the emerging generations, the roles are considered undervalued and underpaid, with increasingly more reports in the media highlighting this.

The consultation process for the 2021 Training Package update confirmed a number of ongoing workforce challenges for the sector. These include **staff shortages**, challenges in **regional and remote areas, quality and consistency in skills development** and **professionalism, staff conditions and leadership**.

Staff shortages is a major challenge for the sector. The Australian Government's 2021 Skills Priority List states that there is a national shortage of child care workers across the country, and employers across all sub-sectors are struggling to fill vacancies. To support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the sector's workforce, *The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022-2031)* has been developed outlining 21 actions to be progressed over the next ten years. It is noted that the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted significantly workforce supply and recruitment for workers who were expected to continue working in high-risk settings.

Challenges in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified staff and access to training are magnified in **regional and remote communities**. Specific studies and reports are continuing to highlight the importance of access to quality ECEC in remote communities. It is important to note the broader role that ECEC services can play in these communities and the importance of culturally appropriate content and community trust. Facilitating both learning and work pathways for people within regional and remote communities is advocated by stakeholders and challenges with current qualification structures have been highlighted. These include access to and cost of quality training providers, difficulty in fulfilling work placement and assessment requirements including difficulty in accessing experience in services regulated under the NQF.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children account for a large proportion of children in remote and very remote areas in Australia and therefore are more likely to experience a lack of access to appropriate services. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (which was formally engaged in 2019) has established 'Priority Reforms' regarding the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure lives and outcomes improve for these communities. Early childhood education and care services can play a broader role in the community and the importance of culturally appropriate content and community trust is especially important in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹⁷

CEC sector and VET

Organisations operating across the CEC sector are diverse, and a variety of skills needs, and priorities exist across metropolitan, regional and remote locations. This therefore means that reviewing and developing VET Training Package Products that provide the skills and knowledge required of job roles, as well as achieving smooth implementation and the provision of quality training outcomes are especially challenging. Some of the main challenges and opportunities identified include:

¹⁶ Department of Education, ECEC COVID-19 timeline [Available at: <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/resources/ecec-covid19-timeline>]

¹⁷ Coalition of Peaks. Priority Reforms. Available at: <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/priority-reforms/>

- Competing views often existed during training package consultations. Differences in preferred approaches, training content and skills priorities were often voiced by stakeholders and captured in feedback therefore the IRC was fundamental in exploring the issues and the associated evidence to make decisions that reflected the needs of the sector from a national perspective.
- Implementation issues for new VET training products include administrative burdens on RTOs as they transition to deliver the new products. To ensure systemic issues are addressed and effective implementation is achieved, the following measures are recommended:
 - Strong and ongoing relationships between the sector and training providers, and sector involvement in the validation of learning and assessment materials/activities
 - Robust and reliable assessment by RTOs, including in relation to prior recognition practices
 - The creation of new and improved training and assessment resources to reflect the new and revised Units of Competency.
- The CEC sector is losing senior staff as they decide to leave the sector or retire, and so the sector is losing the number of mentors available to support staff progress to middle management and senior roles. There is an opportunity for training organisations to fill this gap as they may be in a position to offer mentoring programs specific to CEC staff although some stakeholders have expressed that it can be difficult to access TAE qualified personnel with industry currency.

There has been an established awareness of the importance of leadership and management skills for those in senior positions in CEC services, and requirements vary based on the structure of services and how responsibilities are assigned within an organisation. In addition, there is now a growing emphasis on operational leadership skills for all job roles within services. Contrasting to finance and administration, and skills in leading staff, there is a value being placed on the ability of people working effectively as part of a team, exercising leadership in the day-to-day routines and logistics to enable the smooth operation of services.

An additional type of leadership in the sector is pedagogical leadership. Every service under the NQF is required to have a designated Educational Leader, and there is an emerging need for education and training with a focus on the development and application of these skills

Some stakeholders have a view that there is a significant difference between OSHC and LDC roles and responsibilities, particularly with Diploma qualified staff. This view highlights the need for skills for negotiation upwards with families, principals, and business planning. Alternative views have also been expressed which highlight similarities between the services particularly in respect to theoretical frameworks of child development play and recreation, and learning. In addition, training funding models can mask workforce development and broader labour market issues which need to be addressed.

- Traineeships can enhance continuity with staffing as the model formalises ongoing employment arrangements with skills development and fosters on the job mentoring and support. They were reported as the most preferred mode of training for educators in ACECQA's workforce survey of CEC educators and teachers during 2019,¹⁸ however they were also difficult to come by.

¹⁸ Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) Workforce report November 2019 [Available at: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/ProgressingNationalApproachChildrensEducationCareWorkforce.pdf>]

- Many OSHC staff are employed on a casual basis with short shifts and part time hours, with university students making up a significant part of the workforce. With the rapid growth in this sector the need for a stable core workforce, it has become more significant. This was a factor in considering the development of a *Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care* as the entry pathway which could be delivered as a traineeship and used to promote employment in a rapidly growing sector and attract young people looking to start a career with strong potential pathways. It is envisaged that national qualifications which are aligned to the needs of the sector will assist in addressing the current challenges of various jurisdictional requirements particularly for providers, operating in multiple states. Qualifications specific to the sector will also enable more specific consideration of funding models and skills priorities.
- Education Support roles within the school system are meeting an increasing breadth of circumstances and needs of students. Additional skills and knowledge relating to supporting students with specific needs are often provided outside the VET system to target specific information and requirements. This is often dependant on the management structure and resources of the school and coordination of education support provided. There are recent, additional variables where students are eligible for assistance under the NDIS and have their own support which can impact the requirements and arrangements for any school-based education support roles.
- The recent training package update highlighted the potential for mobility between roles in the OSHC and education support sectors. Enhanced mobility could help address the labour shortages in each of these sectors as often the OSHC service is on or within proximity to schools and involve the same students. In OSHC the nature of the work can mean staff are required to do split shifts (i.e. before and after school hours) whereas education support staff are required within school hours. Continuity of staff in the day of a student can also potentially achieve enhanced understanding and coordination of student support requirements.¹⁹
- Recent feedback captured from CEC sector stakeholders showed that important priorities for the VET sector in the short-to-medium future should be industry engagement and achieving an increase in government funding for VET (SkillsIQ's 2022 Skills Survey).

Moving forward these opportunities need to continue to be explored and ensure that there is cross-sectoral consultation and collaboration between industries, the VET sector, and government.

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IRC Chair/s

¹⁹ The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) in partnership with NOSHA are undertaking a study to explore best practice and creating evidence-based resources to support teachers and educators with helping students move between out of school hours care and services and school [Further information available at: https://www.noshsa.org.au/files/ugd/0909e6_cc9df3391a0c42b5a3267e7fb04af5cc.pdf]