

Darwin, 30 January 2014

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
Productivity Commission
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Dear Commissioners,

Submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. This submission has been prepared by Dr Kate Golebiowska and Ms Alicia Boyle from the Northern Institute and Mrs Denise Horvath, who is a senior teacher and a leader of the Children's Services and Education Support team, at Charles Darwin University. Their submission contributes evidence on overseas-born workers in the early childhood workforce in the NT, which is relevant to 'Government regulation of childcare and early learning' (Terms of Reference, point 4).

This submission is informed by a pilot project "Employment and mobility trajectories of overseas-born early childhood education and care workers in Darwin, NT", which they have recently completed.

The Northern Institute is the University's flagship research institute that carries out social and policy research focusing on northern Australia and its near neighbours. Our work spans a number of topics relevant to the northern Australian context such as workforce training and development, demography and growth planning, social inclusion and sustainability, and community engagement with a view to inform public debate and policy development. The Institute's teams work in partnerships with local, national and international universities, industry, not for profit agencies and leading thinkers to seed and undertake research activities.

The research underpinning this submission was funded by a small Charles Darwin University Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts grant in 2012 with a view to enable the research team to develop a baseline body of knowledge to support a more in-depth study of the early childhood workforce in northern Australia in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Ruth Wallace
Director,
Northern Institute

Overview

This submission provides evidence on overseas-born early childcare and education care workers (ECEC) in the Northern Territory (NT). Before this pilot study was completed (Golebiowska *et al.* 2013; Golebiowska and Boyle, in press), virtually no data appears to have existed that would permit understanding of the characteristics and contributions of the overseas-born workforce to the provision of care to young children in the NT. The former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) conducted a national Census of the ECEC workforce in 2010 and 2013 but the region or country of birth was not included in the questionnaire. Although findings reported in this submission are limited to only one jurisdiction and are based on a relatively small sample, they nevertheless provide a snapshot of a 'hidden' component of the ECEC workforce and enhance the understanding of the dynamics of this workforce.

In particular, this submission makes the following points:

- Overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT represent 27.5% of the entire ECEC workforce in the Territory. The single largest group was born in Asia.
- The majority of overseas-born ECEC workers interviewed for this study were family stream migrants. Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) data reveals a similar pattern for the NT and Australia as a whole.
- Reading and writing skills in English of these workers needs to be improved. Funding should be made available for this purpose.
- The 2011 Census showed that overseas-born ECEC workers in NT and nationally have lower levels of education than the Australian-born. In the interview sample, 67% had already met the minimum qualifications standards required to work in the sector after 1 January 2014.
- A substantial proportion (44%) of the interviewed overseas-born ECEC workers have more than seven years of experience in the sector.
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a desirable way of assisting some experienced workers achieve formal recognition of their skills.
- There is scope to increase the number of qualified early childhood teachers in the NT.
- Having overseas-born workers from the same centre study for a particular qualification with the same provider creates opportunities for mutual support and should be encouraged.
- Overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT are a stable component of this workforce and will benefit from further investment.
- Improving attraction to the ECEC sector in the NT may involve promotion of permanent employment contracts, greater likelihood of reaching a management level (for overseas-born) than elsewhere in Australia, scholarships and career advice to graduates.

Background

The pilot study of overseas-born early ECEC workers in the NT has documented their demographic and economic characteristics, investigated their skill levels and level of employment, job satisfaction, professional development expectations and mobility intentions. High population and workforce mobility in peripheral regions such as the NT is well evidenced (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003:41; Garnett *et al.* 2008:9,13,26,34, 35,51–2,56–7,66,84,88–9,90; Golebiowska and Carson 2009:40,45–7; Carson *et al.* 2011:6; Northern Territory Treasury (NTT) 2012:54,59). Simultaneously, research has linked staff stability in the ECEC sector with positive child outcomes (Moon and Burbank 2004:5; Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team 1995 in Cross *et al.* 2009:293–4; Taguma *et al.*

2012:9,35). As the NT ECEC workforce is small, high turnover would likely have negative effects on the quality of service and potentially child development.

Methods, data and geographic coverage

Our findings are based on statistical and empirical data analysis. First, we have used unpublished ABS 2011 Census statistics on the ECEC overseas-born workers in the NT and unpublished DIAC statistics on permanent additions to the NT population of immigrants with ECEC-related qualifications between 2001–02 and 2010–2011. Analysis of these data was descriptive because small numbers did not warrant an advanced statistical analysis. It also follows that the obtained values are best approximates rather than actual precises. Second, information was obtained from twenty-seven personal interviews with overseas-born staff employed at six long day childcare centres in Darwin and Palmerston. The interviews were conducted in July and August 2012. The pilot nature of this project and small research team did not permit to extend this study to other types of facilities and to include a sample of the Australian-born workers.

Results

Workforce Size and Region of Birth At the 2011 Census, the overseas-born represented 24.8% of the entire ECEC workforce in Australia and 27.5% of the ECEC workforce in the NT (Table 1). At that time, there were 1,515 individuals employed in this sector in the NT (419 overseas-born). The Asian-born represented the single largest overseas-born group in the NT and Australia but their proportionate share was higher in the NT than nationally. In the interviews, 67% were born in Asia, 4% in the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland and 15% each in the Pacific Islands and ‘all other countries’.

Table 1. Region of birth, employed ECEC workers* in NT and Australia.

Region of birth	% 2011 Census	
	NT	Australia
Aus-born (incl. External Territories)	71.1	74.0
NZ-born	1.9	2.2
Asia-born	15.7	9.6
UK & IRE-born	3.4	4.8
Born elsewhere in Europe	1.8	2.7
Born in all other countries	4.7	5.5
Ovs-born (excl. NZ)	25.6	22.6
Ovs-born (incl. NZ)	27.5	24.8
Not stated	1.4	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Note: *Childcare centre managers, early childhood teachers, childcare workers, family day care workers, nannies, child carers not further defined (nfd) and preschool aides.

Source: ABS 2011 Census, unpublished data.

Age Structure and Gender Composition Figure 1 shows that at the 2011 Census the overseas-born in the NT and Australia were generally older. In the interviews there was a low proportion of the youngest workers (15%) and higher proportions of middle age and older workers. The 2011 Census has also showed that proportions of women employed in this sector in the NT and nationally ranged from 94% to 97%. In the interviews 100% participants were women.