

Title: Ex Member Survey – Reasons for Leaving the Sector	
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Overview: <i>A summary of results from survey of members who have left the sector in the last 12 months</i>	

OVERVIEW

These are the results of a survey conducted in January 2013 of United Voice members who have left the ECEC sector in the last 12 months. The survey is the first part of a project to ascertain why individuals are leaving ECEC. The second part of the research project will be a series of focus groups. Participants in the focus groups will be selected from survey participants who expressed an interest in taking part in further discussions about the sector.

METHODOLOGY

PART 1: SURVEY

The survey was conducted over 2 weeks between the 13th January and 27th January. Calls were made in the late afternoon and early evening to maximise the response rate. Calls were made to United Voice members who had rescinded their membership in the preceding 12 months, and who cited as their reason for resigning their membership that they had left the ECEC sector.

The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The first part of the survey included demographic information, including their highest qualification, number of years in the sector, and the first and last role they performed in the sector.

The second part of the survey focused on their experience and perspectives on the sector, and included questions on why they had taken a job in the sector, the positive aspects of the sector and those aspects that could be improved. They were also asked why they had left the sector and what would have encouraged them to stay. Respondents were able to give an open ended response, with the caller recording their responses against a list of possible responses. The list of possible responses was drawn from the 2010 National Workforce Census.

PART 2: FOCUS GROUPS

The second part of the project involves focus groups to gather further information about why people are leaving the sector, and what changes could be made to encourage people to remain in the sector. Participants for the focus groups will be selected from those survey respondents who indicated that they were willing to participate.



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PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 933 individuals were called. 255 agreed to participate in the survey, and 217 declined to participate. 368 didn't answer, with 93 people had an invalid phone number. As indicated in the tables below, the respondents covered a range of qualification types, position types and number of years in the sector.

Qualification	# of respondents	% of total respondents
None	47	18.43%
Certificate 3	67	26.27%
Diploma	95	37.25%
Advance Diploma	22	8.63%
Bachelor 3years	17	6.67%
Bachelor 4years	5	1.96%
Postgrad	2	0.78%
Grand Total	255	100.00%

Years in the Sector	# of respondents	% of total respondents
0	15	5.9%
1 - 5 years	77	30.2%
6 - 10 years	72	28.2%
11 - 15 years	44	17.3%
16 - 20 years	24	9.4%
21 - 25 years	14	5.5%
26 - 30 years	4	1.6%
31 - 35 years	5	2.0%
Grand Total	255	

Last Position Held	# of respondents	% of total respondents
Assistant	92	36%
Assistant Director	24	9%
Director	28	11%
Educator	88	35%
Teacher	22	9%
No response	1	0%
Grand Total	255	

81.56% of respondents had a certificate 3 or above. By comparison, 69.8% of respondents to the 2010 National Workforce Census had at least a certificate 3. The higher rates of qualifications could be attributed to the qualification requirements that were put in place through the NQF.

Only a small number of 4 year bachelor and postgrad qualified respondents took part in the survey. As such, the results reported for these categories may not be representative.

26.6% of respondents to the 2010 National Workforce Census had been in the industry for 10 or more years, compared to 35.8% of survey respondents who had been in the industry for 10 or more years.



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RESPONSES

Number of Unpaid Hours

115 or 46% of respondents stated that they worked some unpaid hours, with the average number of overtime hours worked 5.9 hours per week. 12.9% of respondents said they worked over 10 unpaid hours per week.

Reasons for choosing a job in the sector

73% of respondents stated that they took the job because they wanted to work with children. The next largest reason for choosing a job in the sector was that it was a temporary job, with 7% choosing the profession as a temporary job. There were also a significant number of respondents who gave 'other reasons' for choosing a job in the sector. The relatively low percentage of people stating that they chose the job for temporary reasons, despite anecdotal evidence from our members to the contrary, could be attributed to the method used to select participants. Temporary workers are less likely to join the union, and will therefore not be included in the list of rescinded members contacted to participate in the survey.

What is good about the sector?

Respondents were asked what they thought was good about working in the sector. 76% replied 'working with children', while 15% answered that their colleagues were supportive. Less than 1% responded that the sector was respected in the community, or that there was supportive management.

Note: respondents could list more than one response so totals do not add up to 100%.

Areas of Improvement

Respondents were asked how the sector could be improved. 63.9% of respondents stated increased salaries, 12.1% stated more assistance in completing the new regulation requirements, and 20.4% replied better ratios.

Note: respondents could list more than one response so totals do not add up to 100%.

Reasons for Leaving the Sector

Poor pay is the most common reason given for leaving the sector (36.5%), followed by the job being too stressful (25.1%). These results reflect similar findings in the 2010 workforce census, where 32.9% of respondents cited poor pay, and 21.3% cited stressful working conditions as reasons why they thought they would no longer be employed in the sector in 12 months. However, as can be seen in tables 1 and 2, when the results are broken down by qualification type and years in the sector, significant differences emerge.

Note: respondents could give more than one reason, so totals do not add up to 100%.

As seen in **Table 1**, poor pay is given as the primary reason for leaving the sector, except in the case of Bachelor qualified educators. While poor pay registers highly as a reason for leaving the sector amongst 3yr and 4yr bachelor qualified teachers, the most common reasons given are that the job is stressful or that the hours are too long respectively. These results may reflect the increased responsibilities associated with the role of an ECT. This question should be addressed in the focus group, in order to ascertain how working conditions differ by role and qualification. Furthermore, given that a significant number of bachelor qualified educators leave the ECEC sector to work in the school sector, focus groups should investigate to what extent their perception of working conditions in the sector is influenced by a comparison to the conditions in the schools sector (higher wages, shorter working hours, more prep time, more holidays).

Significantly, respondents who have been in the sector for fewer years are more likely to respond that poor pay was a factor in them leaving the sector. This has significant implications for the ongoing sustainability of the sector, and the difficulty of retaining staff in the future unless wage increases occur.

Educators with an Advanced Diploma are significantly more likely to respond that they left the sector due government regulations and the stress of the job, than those holding other types of qualifications. It is important to



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note that in this case ‘government regulations’ may not refer to the increased reporting requirements under the NQF. Instead, it may refer to the absence of the Adv. Diploma as a distinct qualification level under the new qualification requirements. The NQF specifies ratios of Certificate 3, Diploma and Bachelor qualified staff required relative to the number of children. The focus groups could investigate the impact that this has had on the standing of Advanced Diploma qualified staff within centres, and whether there has been pressure for these staff to upskill to a bachelor degree. Finally, while government regulations may be the most common reason why Advanced Diploma qualified staff have left the sector, they are never cited as the only reason. Other common reasons include low pay and the stress of the job.

As can be expected, workers who have been in the sector for over 30 years are mostly likely to respond that they left the sector due to retirement.

Only 2% of respondents stated that they had left the sector because they had only been in the sector on a temporary basis. These values are significantly lower than those reported in the 2010 workforce study, and could be due to the sample, with temporary workers less likely to join the union.

Table 1: Reasons for Leaving the Sector by Qualification

Qualification	Total # of response	Poor Pay	Study	Gov Regs	Retiring	Mat Leave	Job is stressful	Family Reasons	Hrs too long	Hrs too short
None	47	40.9%	4.3%	8.5%	0%	8.5%	17.0%	10.6%	4.3%	0.0%
Certificate 3	67	47.1%	1.5%	7.5%	0%	9.0%	25.4%	16.4%	4.5%	6.0%
Diploma	95	40.0%	9.5%	5.3%	2.1%	12.6%	24.2%	9.5%	10.5%	0.0%
Adv Diploma	22	47.8%	13.6%	36.4%	9.1%	4.5%	40.9%	13.6%	9.1%	0.0%
Bachelor 3yrs	17	28.4%	5.9%	5.9%	0%	11.8%	41.2%	11.8%	17.6%	5.9%
Bachelor 4yrs	5	29.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%
Postgrad	2	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Grand Total	255	36.5%	6.3%	9.4%	1.6%	9.8%	25.1%	12.2%	8.6%	2.0%

Table 2: Reasons for Leaving the Sector by the Number of Years in the Sector

Years in the Sector	Total # of response	Poor Pay	Study	Gov Regs	Retiring	Mat Leave	Job is stressful	Family Reasons	Hrs too long	Hrs too short
0	15	53.3%	6.7%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	6.7%	20.0%	0.0%
1-5 years	77	44.2%	5.2%	11.7%	1.3%	10.4%	24.7%	9.1%	3.9%	2.6%
6-10 years	72	36.1%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	11.1%	23.6%	13.9%	8.3%	1.4%
11-15 years	44	27.3%	4.5%	4.5%	0.0%	15.9%	29.5%	22.7%	13.6%	4.5%
16-20 years	24	37.5%	8.3%	16.7%	0.0%	8.3%	29.2%	8.3%	4.2%	0.0%
21-25 years	14	21.4%	0.0%	14.3%	7.1%	0.0%	35.7%	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%
26-30 years	4	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
31-35 years	5	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Grand Total	255	36.5%	6.3%	9.4%	1.6%	9.8%	25.1%	12.2%	8.6%	2.0%

COMMENTS

“We do not get enough respect for the role we do - not only do we care for the child, we also nurse them, counsel them, teach them, role model. The conditions we work under are tough - we are constantly under pressure. I also



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think it is really bad that people who are trying to get Newstart essentially get forced into childcare - there at least needs to be some standards. Really, there should not be huge profits made out of child care at all."

"It's a great industry, but they really need to have more recognition for qualifications. Teachers get paid good, and we do just as much as them and should be paid more. The first few years are the most important years of a child's life and we need more recognition for the important work we do."

"I would love to see ECEC in Australia become the best in world but it is not happening this way. A lot of assistants don't have the ability to finish the diploma. They may not have the skills to study (e.g. language barriers) yet they are brilliant carers."

"It can be a fulfilling role, but you just need the right centre and conditions. It just comes to a point where you have to look out for your own health and kids because I kept getting sick all the time."

"It felt like you would never be able to catch up. I would rather clean toilets than work in childcare again. [...] There was constant increase in demands without any equivalent increase in pay or conditions. [...] Bureaucratic requirements constantly frustrated the nominal goals of developing children. [...] pay was insufficient. As a contact director I was in charge of everything from hands on to broad administration which was very stressful. [...] the community-based committee sometimes worked well but had no oversight when they were bad which made working a nightmare. [...] the committee members were often very ignorant about the nature of the work and had no oversight."

"There is still a lot of stigma out there that our job is just babysitting. The community needs to be educated - we work so hard to get there and spend money getting these qualifications."

"If they are going to keep upping the cost of childcare then perhaps they should up the wages. They also need to allocate more time to paperwork."

"Families are not educated enough about the importance of the early years and education. They are made to feel guilty for enrolling children in care."

CONCLUSIONS

Respondents were generally positive about the sector. In the majority of cases they had entered the sector due to a desire to work with children, and except in very rare cases they did not cite difficulties in working with children as a reason for leaving the sector. Instead the most commonly cited problems in the sector were related to working conditions, including poor pay, stressful working conditions, and unpaid working hours. These responses were reflected in the comments regarding ways to improve the sector, with respondents most commonly citing increases in wages, a lessening of paperwork requirements and a reduction in the number of unpaid hours.

The survey points to ongoing problems with the sustainability of the sector unless the issue of wages are addressed. Less experienced staff are more likely to leave the sector due to poor wages, indicating that there is greater turnover of new staff, leading to an ongoing problem of staff retention.

Focus groups for the second part of the research could investigate how specific working conditions impact on job stress, and canvas suggested reforms to the sector to address these stressors. These have included suggestions to lessen unpaid working hours through the formal allocation of paid preparation time (in line with the teacher's award). The oft cited 'job stress' could be further interrogated, in order to understand how this relates to adult-to-child ratios, reporting requirements, and programming time.



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