



Early Childhood Development Workforce Productivity Commission Issues Paper

QCEC response, January 2011

1. Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) submits this response on the Early Childhood Development Workforce Productivity Commission Issues Paper (November 2010) on behalf of the 23 education authorities representing 288 Catholic schools in Queensland. Feedback from members of the QCEC Pre-prep Taskforce, representing Catholic dioceses and agencies that provide early childhood education and care, responded to issues within the Issues Paper most relevant to their context.

2. Early childhood development

2.1 Scope of QCEC response

As stated in the Issues paper (p2,3) the Early Childhood Development (ECD) workforce study has restricted its scope to those early childhood education and care, child health and family support services working with children in the years *before* formal schooling starts and not in later years. In Queensland this refers to children receiving education and care services prior to attending school in the Prep year (or Year 0).

Catholic schools in Queensland provide inclusive education for students attending the years of formal schooling from Prep to Year 12. Currently limited early years education and care services provided to children *prior* to formal schooling (i.e. Prep) is offered. QCEC has recently become a stakeholder in the provision of early childhood education and care services by being approved as a Central Governing Body by the Queensland Government Department of Education. As a Central Governing Body, QCEC will play an increasingly important role in the roll out of kindergarten services across Queensland.

Therefore the feedback in this submission comes from the viewpoint of an education sector that is primarily involved in the provision of education to children from Prep onwards. However QCEC anticipates the supply and demand for qualified early years teachers to be a substantial issue to impact on both the early childhood education and care sector and the education sector in coming years.

2.2 Integration of ECD services

There are benefits to integrating kindergarten services on school sites as it provides continuity in learning for young children. However in Queensland there are serious limitations due to marked differences in the legislative Acts that govern early childhood

education and care (currently Queensland *Child Care Act 2003*) and formal schooling (*Education General Provisions Act 2006*). Each Act has its own regulatory requirements and funding provisions.

ECD workers are employed under different Awards and Certified Agreements resulting in variation of employment conditions between the ECEC sector and the education sector. This creates an inequitable situation where teachers employed on the 'one site' operate under very different employment conditions (i.e. salary, hours of work, conditions). Catholic education authorities view this matter as an injustice to teachers in ECEC settings and believe urgent attention is required to attract, employ and retain qualified teachers in all settings.

3. The early childhood development workforce

The care and education of young children is not viewed within the community as having a high status. The ECD workforce is predominantly female which may be a factor in the low wages of ECD workers. Wages are relatively low for the level of responsibilities of ECD workers have in fulfilling regulatory requirements. There can be a high turnover of staff as positions within a service change according to fluctuations in enrolments. A high proportion of ECD workers either leave the profession for a career change or use their ECD experience as a stepping stone to enter school settings.

Often a service will employ additional workers to support children with additional needs to minimise strain on existing staff as there is limited availability of support workers.

4. Institutional arrangement and COAG reforms

The National Quality Framework and National Quality Standard (NQS) are welcomed by the ECEC sector. The raising of expectations within the sector will help to improve learning outcomes for young children. However, a number of issues require attention for the NQS to be implemented successfully. There is a need for:

- intensive and moderated training of all field officers to ensure standards are upheld in a consistent manner across all ECEC services. An example is cited where the same educational program (*QSA Kindergarten Guideline, 2010*) being offered on two different settings (school and ECEC) received conflicting feedback about its use;
- provision of high quality professional development for all ECD workers, including those in regional and remote areas, based on strategic planning and practical delivery;
- child care courses being offered by Registered Training Organisations to provide a high level of training that results in graduates having a sound knowledge of the National Quality Standards.

Concern is raised about the administration of the Australian Government's Child Care Benefit (CCB). As a parental entitlement it appears that some loopholes may exist in the administration of the CCB with some parents in receipt of the allowance not passing the payment onto the ECEC service.

5. Demand for ECD workers

Demand for ECD teachers will increase due to the national COAG (2009) early years reform agenda '*Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*' and the Queensland Government's objective of improving children's

development, wellbeing and school readiness as outlined in the Education Green Paper 'A Flying Start for Queensland Children' (2010). A particular focus area of the national and state commitment to the early years is providing all eligible aged children with access to an educational program for 15 hours a week for 40 weeks a year.

There will be an increasing demand for qualified early childhood teachers to be employed in the new 240 kindergarten services being rolled out across Queensland from 2010-2014 in addition to all existing services delivering an approved kindergarten education program. Adding to this demand is the schooling sector as it seeks to employ teachers with early childhood qualifications to teach Prep – Year 3 classes.

In the Catholic education sector demand for Prep teachers is driven by student enrolments. Future demand for Prep teachers will be driven by predicted growth in Prep student enrolments as well as turnover in existing staff and changing work patterns such as increases in part-time employment.

Prep enrolment patterns in Catholic schools since 2007 (the first official year of Prep) indicate a steady increase across all Catholic schooling authorities. Table 1 illustrates student enrolments in Prep across Catholic schools in Queensland increasing by approximately 3% from 2007 to 2010.

Table 1: 2007-2010 QCEC Prep enrolments by Diocese

Student Headcount	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Archdiocese of Brisbane CEO	4,174	6,144	6,608	6,762	6,762
Diocese of Cairns CES	476	731	786	803	803
Diocese of Rockhampton CEO	631	1,096	1,119	1,167	1,167
Diocese of Toowoomba CEO	537	767	752	799	799
Diocese of Townsville CEO	581	934	905	975	975
Diocesan	6,399	9,672	10,170	10,506	10,506

An example of the growth affecting staff numbers in one diocese (Brisbane) is in the employment of an additional nine Prep teachers in 2011.

Staff turnover will also affect demand. The Brisbane diocese, with approx 10% turnover rate of primary teachers each year, will need to employ an additional 27 Prep teachers in 2011. Calculating both increased student enrolment and staff turnover rates, it is anticipated that the Brisbane diocese alone will employ an additional 36 Prep teachers in 2011.

There is an increasing demand for standalone kindergartens on school sites to provide families a 'wrap-around' service by allowing children to access Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) facilities. This is another example of the two sectors (ECEC and education) needing to operate collaboratively to support parents as under current legislation kindergarten-aged children are not permitted to be supervised in OSHC facilities before or after school hours.

6. Supply of ECD workers

6.1 Pay and conditions

The supply of ECD workers, in particular qualified early years teachers, is a significant issue for the early childhood education and care sector. Currently there is inequity in pay rates and working conditions between teachers employed in the ECEC sector and the schooling sector. Teachers in each setting operate under different employment Awards and Certified Agreements which means teachers employed in the schooling sector are

higher paid and enjoy more favourable working conditions, i.e. fewer working hours per week and weeks per year, and more non-contact time.

There is a perception that the inequity between teachers employed in ECEC sector and the schooling sector means the early childhood education and care sector does not attract the best applicants. This results in child care services having to accept what is 'left over' after all the teaching vacancies in schools have been filled. In many cases, teachers may begin their career in a child care centre, but will move onto a school as soon as a position becomes available.

It is perceived that the status of a qualified early childhood teacher is quite different depending on the context they are delivering an approved kindergarten program. In the eyes of the community a teacher working in an early childhood education and care centre has lower professional status than a teacher working in a school setting.

It is recommended that a national Kindergarten Teacher Award Agreement be developed to address many of the above issues regarding equitable pay and work conditions for ECD staff.

6.2 Staff retention and turnover

There is a high turnover of ECD staff (i.e. qualified teachers and other ECD workers) in the early childhood education and care sector. The supply of ECD workers is constrained by unattractive remuneration that parallels the same problems faced by the aged care sector where employees are generally experience low morale and status.

This high turnover of staff impacts on the quality of care provided to young children. The consistency of the environment and the quality of relationships in that environment are critical factors in early childhood brain development. A high turnover of staff can therefore have a detrimental impact on a young child's development.

The sector has been unable to retain staff over extensive period of time due to low wages, lack of recognition, long work hours and constant changes to regulations and compliance matters. Staff tend to either move into the schooling sector or into other employment. While the situation remains that a qualified early childhood teacher delivering exactly the same educational program will experience markedly different remuneration and working conditions teachers prefer to be employed in the education sector. There is much work to be done to attract and retain quality staff and improve the professional status and morale of all ECD workers.

The constant burden of regulations imposed on the ECEC sector has been the cause of many ECD workers leaving the profession. ECD workers feel that the bureaucracy, 'paper trail' and 'red tape' is continually increasing, making less time available for meaningful interactions with the children in their care.

Kindergarten services will need to develop creative ways of attracting and retaining staff, especially in hard to access areas, whilst balancing budgets and offering a viable service. Additional fees charged to parents to offset any incentives may cause parents struggling to meet rising child care costs to use to other forms of child care.

6.3 Employment of qualified early childhood teachers

Catholic education authorities in Queensland have varying experiences with employing four year qualified early years teachers. To illustrate this point the following information is provided by the Brisbane diocese about the response to an advertisement for teaching

positions that specifically requested a Prep teacher with early childhood qualifications for the 2011 school year:

- ten Prep teacher vacancies
- total of 205 applicants (20.5 applications per position)
- number of applicants per position ranged from 58 to 19
- of the 205 applicants 67 (approx 33%) stated in their application forms they had early childhood qualifications
- number of early childhood qualified applicants per advertised position is 6.7 (assuming that the claimed qualifications are genuine and that all those who have early childhood qualifications nominated those qualifications in their application).

Although there were no issues in staffing Prep teaching positions for the 2011 school year there were some locations in which supply was not as strong. Although no regional areas advertised specifically for Prep teachers, there were two regional advertisements for teachers in the broader early years range:

- St Joseph's School, Murgon advertised for a 'lower years' teacher and received three applicants, none of whom claimed an early childhood qualification.
- St Patrick's Primary School, Nanango advertised for an 'early years' teacher and received 13 applicants, six of whom claimed an early childhood qualification.

In the Townsville diocese a recent advertisement for a four year trained teacher with Early Childhood Education qualifications resulted in four applications all having three year qualifications.

These figures suggest that demand is high for four year trained early childhood teachers, with particular services in regional locations suffering from a shortage of early childhood teachers.

Another issue confronting ECEC services is accessing qualified relief staff. In many centres it is difficult to employ a qualified early years teacher to replace a teacher on leave (e.g sick leave) as they prefer to work a relief day in a school, where they receive more pay and are not required to work longer hours.

6.4 Qualifications and career pathways

The Queensland Office of Early Childhood Education and Care has created the Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships program to meet the growing demand for early childhood teachers. More than 800 existing early childhood education and care staff in Queensland currently hold a three-year university qualification, but are not registered with the Queensland College of Teachers. The scholarship program helps staff to upgrade their qualifications so they can teach a kindergarten program. In 2010, 80 scholarships, in excess of \$12,000 each, were awarded to staff holding a three-year university qualification. However, with these limited scholarships places the supply of four year trained early childhood teachers for future years remains.

To support the supply of qualified early childhood teachers the Brisbane diocese has provided scholarships to teachers to upgrade their qualifications. Since 2008, 54 staff members (1.6% of total primary teaching staff) have been awarded scholarships to complete a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (Early Childhood) at the Australian Catholic University.

The introduction of standalone kindergartens on Catholic school sites means more than the need for an increase in qualified early childhood teachers. In addition to teachers, education authorities will require a range of other staff to support the introduction of kindergarten:

- Suitably qualified and experienced Education Officers to develop and provide professional learning for staff as well as resources for schools providing a kindergarten program.
- Teacher aides with appropriate early childhood qualifications and experience to support kindergarten classrooms.
- Additional Guidance Counsellors, Learning Support Teachers, Curriculum Support Teachers and other specialist teachers to support the introduction of kindergarten.

7. Productivity of the ECD workforce

With regard to the section 'Productivity of the ECD workforce' (p21) the following comments are made: How can 'productivity improvements' be measured in the short term? The results of high quality early childhood education may not be evident in economic and social terms for many years to come. Research in early brain development (Frank Oberklaid) provides evidence of the positive impact of high quality child care on young children's lives. If we invest in the first five years of a child's life there will be many positive returns on our investment both economically and socially in the future.

8. Lessons from other sectors and other countries

8.1 Education sector

The education sector has a long standing reputation for fair work conditions, wages and professional development. Workplace conditions have been negotiated through industrial avenues and the early childhood sector may need to become more proactive in this sphere if the work conditions of ECD workers are to improve.

8.2 Advisory teachers

Preschools in Queensland in the past had 'advisory teachers' who would visit centres to share and demonstrate best practice. This was highly effective in sharing both ideas and professional development. Preschool teachers valued this input and teacher networks and teaching practice improved as a result.

8.3 Integration of services

The integration of early childhood education and care services, child health services, and family support services across Australia as a nation would provide a consistent, efficient and effective service base to all families.

9. Conclusion

QCEC understands that the Productivity Commission will release a draft report in June 2011 setting out preliminary conclusions and recommendations based on the feedback received. QCEC trusts that the feedback provided in the QCEC response will contribute towards positive outcomes for Australia's Early Childhood Development workforce.