

Joint Submission Early Childhood Development Workforce

SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY and EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA (ECA) (NSW) NORTH COAST.

Submission:

Scope of the ECD Sector

Given the terms of reference, is the suggested scope of the ECD workforce appropriate for the purposes of this study?

The terminology of the scope of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector is inappropriate for the purposes of the study. Care and education are intricately interwoven (CCCH, 2007) and should not be separated into care OR education.

OECD (2006) adopted early childhood education and care (ECEC) to reinforce the need for an integrative approach to children's development and learning. All ECEC services provide 'care', where care in this context means being supervised in a safe environment. Childcare evolved as charitable welfare services in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to improve health and nutrition of children from very poor or destitute families. But all formal childcare services in the 21st century in Australia should now provide early childhood education of good quality where a child's learning and development is promoted. Every child is entitled to be in a care setting that is of good quality. Saying that early childhood education only occurs in preschools the year before school (see page 3) is inappropriate as early childhood education is recognised in all formal childcare settings from birth to the year before school. This focus has been gazetted by the Federal Government and COAG. Children begin to learn at birth. Within every moment that an adult cares for a child infant is considered a moment rich in learning (CCH, 2007).

All children with additional needs should be included in this study.

Benefits of integrating ECEC services include: one drop off point for parents; easy access to information about services for parents; opportunities for staff from differing

disciplines (for example the early childhood teacher and the occupational therapist) to closely work together for the benefit of the child.

Limitations of integrating ECEC services include- differing philosophical approaches to the promotion of children's learning and development may cause problems; services may become too large and lose their family focus.

Early childhood development workforce

Preschools should not be separated out from formal childcare settings (page 6) as this would promote the education/care divide. It is essential that service terminology reflects the approach that care and education are not segregated. Therefore formal childcare settings should include preschools as they offer 'care and education' for 3-5 year olds.

The term 'contact' workers should be changed to 'childcare' workers. In the Early Years Learning Framework, (DEEWR, 2009), (the National curriculum for early childhood education and care) the term 'educators' is used. This term should only be used by those childcare workers who have been trained to deliver an educational program. Currently it includes every person working with young children which needs revising as not all those people are trained and do not understand the value of education in the early childhood sector.

Accepted terminology across the ECEC sector for formal childcare settings (excluding family day care, and in-home care) should be

- Directors
- Early childhood teachers (indicating graduate from university)
- Qualified childcare workers (indicating diploma/certificate from accredited provider)
- Unqualified childcare workers.

Institutional arrangements

There needs to be uniform terminology across Australia regarding service provision, and government agencies. For too long ECEC has been fragmented within and between states. Having a National curriculum for ECEC is a significant step forward and implementing the National Quality Framework (NQF) will support the provision of education and care that is of consistent quality throughout Australia. This is an opportunity to now have universal terminology with one National Government Department managing the ECEC sector. This would then be supported by having universal policies across Australia such as Occupational Health and Safety policies and standards; Fire safety standards, building standards, playground safety, etc. All of this would build a stronger ECEC sector, and make it less confusing for the workforce, training institutions and families to move interstate, and would minimise replications between states.

The National Partnership Agreement that seeks to provide access to 15 hours of ECEC in the 'year before school' is to be provided by a four year trained university teachers. This is a very important point for the future supply and demand of the ECD workforce and has implications for the training and upgrading of the workforce. It should be noted that it is not uncommon for assistants within NSW community based preschool services for 3-5 year olds to hold a certificate III as a minimum qualification. There has been a consistent interest in obtaining a position within a preschool setting by both teachers and child care workers due to the shorter hours of work, and holiday periods. There is also a reduction in the attrition rate of staff within such settings for the same reason.

Demand for ECEC workers.

In response to the question:

What are some of the child development reasons families choose to use or not use different ECEC services, and how is this changing over time?

While the ABS (2008) states that parents choose formal childcare because “it is beneficial for their child” (ECD, 2010, p.12) this data should be questioned as it relies on post hoc reporting. Parents who were surveyed by ABS for this data were able to access this type of care so it does not present a true picture of parents’ preferred choices as not all parents can access their preferred care. Formal childcare enables parents to utilise time in either work or leisure. Parents are likely to report that they have chosen their child’s care for their child’s benefit as they feel judged as a parent, and if they were to say that they chose this care so that they could engage in paid work then they may be judged as ‘uncaring’ or even ‘bad’ parents. Also once parents begin using formal childcare it becomes familiar, and if there is no overt difficulty or harm for the child then parents are more likely to assess this care as beneficial for the child.

It is not possible to therefore conclude that the usage of these types of care (as per ABS, 2008) reflect real choice in the wider community. The fact that parent’s preferred choice may not be readily available, has been largely disregarded. Additionally parents of younger children (0-12 months) prefer care provided by a known trusted person, that is informal care (Boyd, Thorpe & Tayler, 2010). When parents are able to access preferred care, that is they can choose care, they use formal childcare as the child grows older as the child is considered more able to cope with a large group setting.

Parents often do not have access to their preferred type of care, due to cost, availability, or location. If they select care that is not their preferred care the care still needs to be of high quality. For equity reasons all formal childcare should have staff that are trained in the provision of high quality care delivered by a trained early childhood person. In this way all parents and children have equal access to high quality care. There is concern by parents that formal childcare is not suitable for children in the first year of their lives as they know that caring for their child was a full-time job yet in formal childcare settings they would leave their child in the care of an adult who has at least 3 other babies to care for (Boyd, 2010) (according to the new national standards implemented in 2012). Parents and children deserve to be able to

access their preferred care, but currently many parents' preferred care for infants is not accessible.

To what extent is the female labour force participation influenced by the availability of formal childcare? How might the demand for ECEC services be affected by changes to the female labour force participation? To what extent does the relative cost of ECEC services determine the demand for those services?

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To what extent is female labour force participation influenced by the availability of formal childcare? How might the demand for ECEC services be affected by changes to female labour force participation?

The demand for ECEC services is likely to continue to grow, as the population increases, increased rates of fertility and the female labour force continues to grow. With the introduction of paid parental leave for 18 weeks in 2011 this is likely to reduce slightly the need for childcare for very young children. Engaging in paid work and selecting care for the child is a complex decision making process for families. Accessing good quality care can be difficult for women attempting to return to paid work (Bourke, 2006). The quality of care in formal childcare settings has been reported to be an emotional barrier to women's engagement in the workforce. For example, Harris (2008) reports women feel emotionally torn by the decision to support their family financially, which may come at the cost of placing a child in a formal care setting that they deem as unacceptable. This in turn, impacts upon maternal wellbeing in the workplace (Craig, 2007). So choosing to participate in the workforce is linked to the selection of non-maternal care that is of suitable quality, acceptable to the family, and enhances the child's positive learning and care experiences. The quality of care provided by ECEC services needs to be such that the parents feel emotionally secure leaving their child in care. Good quality care therefore supports good outcomes for children, and good quality care supports women's secure

engagement in the workforce. Provision of good quality of care is associated with a well trained early childhood workforce.

In areas where families cannot access their family or friends for informal care the lack of child care availability impacts upon workforce participation decisions made by women. Areas of transient population such as the Mid-North Coast of NSW leaves families dependent on formal care provision both for occasional care and long day care attendance. Parents are then required to plan for employment based on expected care availability.

How might the proposed qualification standards, staffing levels and the implied mix of skills and knowledge assist the delivery of the desired outcomes for children?

It is important that staff in ECEC settings are qualified in early childhood education, not just for children in the year before they attend formal schooling (as currently proposed by the NQF) but for every child in care from 0-5 years of age. Research demonstrates that the quality of the education and care of children is linked to the qualifications of staff in early childhood settings (Whitebrook et al., 1989; Clarke-Stewart et al., 2002) and staff trained in ECEC produce better outcomes for children (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Elliot, 2004; Thorpe et al 2004). Early events in a child's life influence the life-course trajectory (Moore & Oberklaid, 2010). As maternal employment supports economic productivity, formal childcare should become a public concern, where there is universal access to good quality care for every child, not just for those who can afford it. This is equitable; it represents real choice and supports the rights of the child (Thorpe, Cloney & Tayler, 2010) while at the same time protecting and promoting the public interest (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2010). In this way children's health and wellbeing will be supported (Moore & Oberklaid, 2010) while children are in non-parental care, in environments that support their learning and development.

What effect will the new standards and targets have on demand for ECD workforce?

The new standards and targets will place greater demand on the need for ECEC trained teachers but there are issues surrounding the pay and work conditions for teachers. Early childhood trained teachers need to be on par in salary and working conditions to their counterparts in the formal schooling system otherwise they are unlikely to be attracted to working in and remain attached to the ECEC field. Currently the Federal Government is training the ECEC workforce and making training places available in universities for ECEC degree courses that train teachers in either the age range of 0-8 year olds, or 0-12 years. While this is an initiative that is linked to the 15 hours of universal access to preschool for four year olds it is likely that many of these trained teachers will not work in the 0-5 years settings owing to poorer working conditions than offered in formal schooling. Being a trained teacher in 0-5 year settings the salary is considerably lower, the hours of work longer with less paid time for programming, the intensity of the job higher, and holidays are just four weeks per annum compared to teachers in primary school who have 11 weeks paid annual leave. So the government is spending money training these people for ECEC when they are likely to not work in ECEC. This needs attention. It can be changed by giving ECEC teachers similar working conditions to those teachers in primary school settings. This will cost a significant amount of money and should be funded by a central national body. If this does not happen the significant investment that the National Government is making in training the early childhood workforce will be for little gains in supporting the provision of the NQF. Currently in some states a lump sum of money is being paid to early childhood services to support the employment of trained early childhood teachers. For example in NSW this is \$8000 per annum. However there is no accountability linked to this payment that it be spent on trained early childhood teachers' conditions and salary.

The effect of ECEC teachers not on parity with primary school teachers results in the status of the ECEC workforce being reduced. Teaching needs to be made an attractive career choice and the image and status of teachers needs to be increased (OECD, 2005).

In regional locations there is the additional challenge of attracting trained teachers. Regional areas continue to present challenges for prospective families in

relation to accessing health and medical services as well as other educational opportunities afforded by larger populations in major cities. ECEC services in regional and remote areas can require exemptions from regulatory requirements relating to qualified staff in order to continue operation and this means that the same quality is not provided for children and families in these locations.

The other effect the new standards will have is that it will cost ECEC settings to employ trained teachers. There needs to be funds available to employ teachers. It is proposed by this submission that the National Government takes over the payment of ECEC trained teachers as this is shown to support the quality of ECEC provision (OECD, 2006). Private childcare providers are stating that they this will pass these costs onto parents at approximately \$20 per day. This is extremely unfair to parents.

Another effect may be that ECEC services may not be able to access trained teachers and there may be pressure to grant untrained teachers 'qualified' status in order to meet the new standards. This would not be an acceptable outcome for the investment currently being made in the sector .

What options are available for funding the increased wages and salaries of more highly qualified ECD workers?

It is really important that the Government continue with the employment of trained ECEC teachers in ECEC settings, and expand this into having trained ECEC teachers for all children aged 0-6 years not just for the children in their year prior to school. The employment of trained teachers needs to be paid for by the Government and in this way services will have access to trained teachers which in turn benefits all children in these services. Evidence suggests that direct public funding of ECEC services brings better quality of early childhood services, and better equitable access compared with parent subsidy models (OECD, 2006)

As stated above the teachers need to be paid at the same rate and have similar working conditions to their counterparts in the formal schooling system otherwise attrition rates will be high which will affect the quality of care. Research has shown that retention of staff is closely linked to the quality of care. The relationships that develop

between children and their ECEC workers underpin the provision of good quality care and is of great significance to children's learning and development.

Research consistently demonstrates the value of investment in the early years of early childhood for social and economic well-being of the nation (Heckman, 2006), and there is evidence that provision of good quality care has long lasting effects on child well-being, attainments and social inclusion (Schweinhart, 2003). This is key evidence cited by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) for the commitment of significant investment in the early years national agenda, promoting access and quality care (COAG, 2009).

ECEC staff also need ongoing access to professional development and the Government needs to ensure that there is financial provision for this to happen. Research in the area of ECEC is increasing rapidly and staff need to be able to keep up to date with how to provide the best environment for children's learning and development.

Supply of ECD workers

Do providers of ECD services have difficulties finding staff? If so, are these problems more pronounced in some ECD occupations or in some areas of Australia? Why is this the case?

There are reported shortages of staff for ECEC settings in Australia. Corporate ECEC settings had difficulty finding and retaining staff when ABC Learning existed (Rush, 2006). Anecdotally there are not enough applicants to fill the positions that are available and the attrition rate runs in the vicinity of 15% annually. This is likely to be a result of poor working conditions, low pay and low status of the early childhood workforce.

How much of the shortage is caused by low wages or wage differentials? Are there other factors (such as working hours or conditions) that are important in attracting staff to the sector?

The pay and working conditions have been reported to be barriers to working in the ECEC field. Research by Boyd and Gibson (under review) of pre-service students demonstrated that just 5% of students in the third year of their four year early childhood education degree (that trained them to teach 0-8 year olds) wanted to work in 0-5 years settings. They cited pay, work conditions and the stressful working environment as barriers compared to the conditions working in 5-8 year settings.

To what extent are ECEC, child health and family support services experiencing staff retention issues? Are there examples of effective staff retention strategies in the ECD sector? How might such strategies be replicated throughout Australia?

Anecdotally ECEC are experiencing shortages of qualified staff for various reasons:

1. Underpaid compared to their primary school counterparts. The obvious solution is to increase pay rates and working conditions to bring them on par with other teachers funded as part of the NQF.
2. Poor leadership owing to inadequate training of Directors. In Qld directors of ECEC settings only need to have completed a diploma yet they are responsible for teachers in their setting who have completed a degree. Good leadership and management comes from good training.
3. Lack of access by staff to professional development opportunities- there needs to be provision within every ECEC setting for professional development for staff to keep up to date in the ECEC field.
4. Low status of ECEC staff owing to poor work conditions and low pay rates.
5. No career path for ECEC teachers.
6. The workforce is mainly comprised of females who have their own family after commencing work in early childhood. To retain these valuable employees there needs to be effective strategies implemented such as the provision of flexible employment for example offering part-time hours, and offering hours of work within their child's hours of schooling.

What are the key factors influencing an individual's decision to work in the ECD sector? Do these vary for different ECD occupations?

A desire to make a difference to young children's lives. Anecdotally there is a perception that anyone can work in ECEC because it is just about caring for children and all women are supposed to be able to do this.

Why are ECD workers paid less than those working in related sectors? Are the wages and salaries for workers in different ECD occupations appropriate, given the skills and qualifications required? If not, how might this best be addressed?

ECEC teachers are paid less because the work is undervalued by society and up until recently it was undervalued by the Australian Government. It has only been since 2007 that the Australian Government has acknowledged the importance of the early years and is investing money into better provision for ECEC. Children are the future adult citizens of Australia who will be making decisions about what is best for the country. They deserve the best possible ECEC available. Yet early childhood workers are underpaid and undervalued .

See above for wages and work conditions.

Services in rural and remote locations can experience situational factors that exacerbate existing challenges presented by current wages and pay conditions. For instance on the Mid-North coast with a number of isolated townships and a transient population there is significant challenge in the area of maintaining a casual pool of suitably qualified and experienced early childhood staff for children's services. Without some form of program for managing a region wide casual pool there is simply not enough work to sustain individual casual employees. A number of individuals will move on due to a lack of consistent availability of work and or they are attracted to other local employment such as retail. Sadly, this can offer better income.

Does the regulatory burden have a significant impact on attracting or retaining staff in the ECD sector? Do you expect recently announced reforms to make a material difference to the regulatory burden facing ECD workers? What more could be done to reduce the regulatory burden?

The new reforms for ECEC with the National Quality Standard will reduce the regulatory burden by reducing the accreditation documentation requirements. In addition, unannounced 'spot checks' and lack of time frame for review contributed to staff stress.

There is a need to address the discrepancy in time allocation for completion of record keeping and other written work required for program delivery and accreditation. While the face to face contact time continues to be limited in comparison to primary school counterparts early childhood teachers continue to experience a preference for primary teaching positions.

How appropriate are the qualifications required for entry into various ECD occupations? Do differences in qualification requirements restrict workers' ability to move between jurisdictions or ECD sectors?

The qualifications required for teaching in ECD is not adequate. All children deserve qualified ECEC four year trained teachers not just those children in the year prior to going to school. Certificate III in Children's Services is inadequate to work with young children. There needs to be more in-depth engagement with and education of the field of ECEC workers prior to beginning teaching young children.

As all staff are actively involved in the delivery of the program for children and are required to make independent decisions throughout their working day, it is critical that all staff members have a training and guided professional experience.

Do newly-qualified ECD workers have the necessary skills and attributes to be effective in the workplace?

Yes ECEC pre-service teachers have the necessary skills and attributes if they have had adequate practicum experience in the ECEC field. The training in Certificate 3 is inadequate for working with young children to be considered to be trained.

To what extent are qualification requirements a barrier to entering the ECD sector? How could any such barriers be overcome? Do people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds face particular barriers to obtaining entry-level ECD qualifications?

Training is expensive and needs to be subsidised. It is very important to have people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds to work with young children. It is invaluable to have diversity in the ECD workforce that reflects the diversity of families and children within the services themselves.

Are workers who obtain additional skills and qualifications sufficiently rewarded? Is expertise sufficiently recognised and valued? How could opportunities for career progression within the ECD sector be enhanced?

Workers who obtain additional skills are not rewarded. Training is not valued or acknowledged through any financial means. Career progression could be supported by being a mentor (paid) for others training to be ECEC workers. ECEC settings could be encouraged to be more active in undertaking research and publishing their results.

Do you consider professional status to be an issue for the ECD workforce? What factors determine professional status in the sector? How might a change in status be achieved? What would be the effects of such a change?

Yes professional status is an issue- ECEC workers are not taken seriously as "anyone can look after children'. Not until ECEC workers are paid appropriate wages with

better working conditions will this change. These changes will demonstrate that this working sector is valued and will have a spinoff effect.

Will the supply of qualified ECD workers expand sufficiently to meet COAG's objectives? How might the training of additional workers be funded?

See previous discussion on pages 7 and 8.

Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector?

What can be done to ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled trainers to meet future increases in demand for training?

Not only do ECEC teachers need to be paid on par with their counterparts in the formal schooling sector training also needs to be 0-5 years specific rather than include a degree for 5-8 or 5-12 years as well. In this way it is acknowledged as a valid field of expertise and a legitimate and credible vocation.

What is the scope for productivity improvements in the ECD sector?

It is not clear that increases in ratios will have a negative impact on productivity. Certainly it will cost more but this is good for children and their families knowing that their child is in better quality care.

Have initiatives to increase the supply of ECD workers been effective?

It is not possible to determine whether these initiatives have been effective yet but anecdotally many students who begin in the ECEC degree course change to a primary degree course because of better pay and work conditions.

Will the workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the ECD sector?

Workers will upgrade their qualifications if the courses are available. There needs to be clear pathways for this to happen. Universities need to be offering the 4th year upgrade for existing staff as soon as possible. Financial incentives would be valuable such as subsidising the HECS debt.

What are the implications for the ECD workforce, in terms of skill-mix requirements and work practices, from integrating or co-locating ECD services? Is there scope for the development of a generalised ECD workforce or a pool of specialised integrated services managers?

There is scope for a pool of specialised service managers but there should not be any sort of skill mixing occurring. This would just water down the ECEC training or the other skills eg occupational therapy. ECEC teaching should be recognised as being sufficient in its own right not as an add-on to other skills sets.

Do ECD workers have the skills to provide effective services to all the children who they regularly work with, including those with disabilities and other special needs and from CALD or low SES backgrounds? What additional skills or support might they require in order to do so?

No they do not have the skills- they need qualified support workers to support them to provide effective services for the children. It is necessary for individuals to specialise in their given area of expertise so that the breadth and depth of assistance provided to families through their involvement in the ECD sector is not compromised.

How appropriate are the remuneration and conditions for ECD workers for children with additional needs?

As with ECEC teachers the pay is too low and work conditions are inadequate. The funding is inadequate to pay for the whole time that the child is in attendance at the childcare service. There are also issues in relation to accessing

appropriate training for individual support workers who due to limited funding availability are often on lower classifications of training. Additional stress factors can also exist for these employees.

Lessons form other sectors and countries

What lessons can be learnt from the ECD sectors in other countries or from other sectors within Australia? What are some of the caveats that need to be taken into account when making comparisons across countries or across sectors?

The work published by Brennan (2009) is useful to illustrate how aspects of other countries' ECD workforces could be adopted in Australia. In Australia there is still a strong belief in maternalism which can be a barrier to ongoing reform (Mahon, 2005). Also there exists beliefs that formal childcare can be harmful to young children (see for example Biddulph, 2005). Additionally Australia has only just introduced paid parental leave whereas Sweden has had 15 months paid parental leave operating for some time. The need therefore for formal childcare settings for 0- 12 months old in Sweden is minimal as parents share the parental leave and the care of the child. When both parents return to paid work there is universal access to good quality care. There are lessons to be learnt from overseas comparisons but attitudes to maternal employment need to change as well.

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