City of Greater Geelong

Submission to

Australian Productivity Commission

Early Childhood Development Workforce Study

January 2011

For further information in relation to this submission please contact:

Linda Quinn
Manager Family Services
City of Greater Geelong
p: 03 5272 4749

e: lquinn@geelongcity.vic.gov.au



INTRODUCTION

Children's services play an important role in society – they promote children's development and learning, they assist parents in balancing work and family responsibilities, they support families and they help build stronger communities. ¹

The City of Greater Geelong welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Australian Productivity Commission's study into Australia's Early Development Workforce.

The City of Greater Geelong recognises the importance of early childhood services and the integral role and responsibilities that the early childhood workforce plays in ensuring provision of high quality support and outcomes are delivered for young children and families, as well as the support that these services play in contributing to the prosperity, development, and wellbeing of the whole community.

Local government in Victoria plays a central role in the provision of early childhood services and workforce development. This includes planning and funding of service infrastructure, provision of an extensive range of services and support programs, along with the employment of a large number of early childhood staff across a range of professions.

In the last decade, the focus on early childhood education and care has experienced 'a surge of attention' in relation to new government policy and program developments, changes in philosophy, and research evidence.

The impetus of change is being driven by an increasing level of awareness about the importance of early childhood as the foundation for later development, including lifelong consequences for health, education and wellbeing.

The Australian government has identified early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a major policy priority and have commenced implementation of an exciting range of new initiatives that include the following:

- Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (UAECE): by 2013, all children in the year before formal school will have access to 15 hours of play-based early childhood education for a minimum of 40 weeks per year delivered by degree qualified early childhood teachers in public, private and community-based preschools and child care.
- Integrated parent and child centres: The development of 'universal, high quality, integrated child centres that bring together maternal and child health, long day care and preschool into 'one stop shops'.
- Early years learning framework: Promoting a consistent and cohesive curriculum framework across the early years with an emphasis on play-based learning, early, literacy and numeracy skills, and social development,
- Improved quality through national early childhood education and care quality standards, investment in the training and education of the early childhood workforce and a new rating system to improve parents' access to information about education and care options.
- In Victoria these reforms are being complemented by the Victorian Children's Services Regulations 2009, with improvements to child:staff ratios, minimum staffing qualifications, regulation of outside school hours care and family day care to ensure minimum standards of quality care are provided.

Implementation of this new agenda and reform process will inevitably require new approaches to workforce development, including the training and preparation of staff; improvements to qualifications, pay rates and employment conditions, and future career



opportunities. Collaboration, goodwill and sustained innovation in policy and funding will also be necessary to achieve these goals. The proposed development and expansion of early childhood services and meeting the challenges of preparing the workforce will depend upon deepening and extending the expertise of people in a range of professions related to the provision of services for children and families - from frontline staff, to program managers, policy makers, and researchers.²

The OECD's report *Starting Strong* notes that "Quality ECEC depends on strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector. Initial and in-service training might be broadened to take into account the growing educational and social responsibilities of the profession. There is a critical need to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable."

Addressing early childhood workforce issues for Australia will need to include recruitment and retention strategies to tackle the high turnover of staff, through improved wages and working conditions, additional pre-service and in-service training and enhanced professional status.

THE CITY OF GREATER GEELONG:

The City of Greater Geelong is one of the largest local government areas in Victoria. The City provides more than 120 services to the municipality which has a population of more than 200,000. The City has an annual budget of \$229 million and employs over 2000 staff. Council also depends on over 800 volunteers who offer their time to deliver essential services to the community.

The municipality has a growing population of families with young children, with over 13,292 children aged between 0-4 years. This population is expected to continue to further increase as new residential development expands over the next ten years.³

The profile of local early childhood services located within the municipality covers a comprehensive range of services and facilities, which include over 367 independently, incorporated and/or operated services provided for children and/or families through a large range of government, commercial and community providers.

Council itself employs a large workforce of early childhood professionals, with over 370 staff engaged in various roles across a wide range of early childhood and family support services. Early childhood services within the City of Greater Geelong include:

- **Maternity Services:** Greater Geelong has two hospitals providing a comprehensive range of prenatal, neonatal and maternity care services, including specialist clinicians and acute paediatric medical services.
- Maternal Child Health (MCH): The MCH service is operated by the City of Greater Geelong, with services being delivered from 21 locations by qualified MCH nurses and children's health workers, and includes provision of outreach service delivery and public immunisation services.
- Long Day Child Care (LDC): There are currently 37 childcare centres located within the City of Greater Geelong, providing a total of 3,172 registered full time places. Seven long care centres are operated directly through Council.
- Family Day Care (FDC): This accredited program offers children aged up to 12 years, quality childcare in the homes of registered care providers. Greater Geelong has a total of 49 registered carers who provide flexible quality care and are supported by a team of field staff employed by Council.



- Occasional Child Care (OCC): There are 11 providers of occasional childcare registered within Greater Geelong. Existing occasional care services collectively provide a total of 292 registered places. Council directly operates 4 occasional care centres integrated within leisure facilities, mainly providing childcare for patrons on a casual basis.
- Outside School Hours Care (OSHC): Greater Geelong has a total of 39 outside school hours care programs, and 12 school vacation care programs. The majority of OSHC care programs are operated in conjunction with local primary schools. Council operates 1 OSHC program and 4 school holiday programs.
- Preschool/Kindergartens: There are a total of 51 kindergartens operating in Greater Geelong. Thirty-one kindergartens are affiliated with the Geelong Kindergarten Association, and 9 are operated through local schools.
- Primary Schools: Greater Geelong has a total of 71 primary schools (including 2 special education schools). There are 47 government-funded primary schools, 14 Catholic primary schools and 10 independent primary schools.
- Playgroups and Toy Libraries: There are over 80 playgroups registered in Greater Geelong, and 10 Toy Libraries (including Noah's Ark for children with special needs). Council also operates a Supported Playgroup Project targeting high needs communities and groups throughout the municipality.
- Family Support and Allied Health: Greater Geelong has over 75 different allied health and family support services located across the municipality. These programs and services provided by various organisations and community groups, including specific targeted services for particular population and priority groups.
- The total workforce employed across all areas of early childhood and family support services in the City of Greater Geelong is estimated to be well over 1,200 individual staff.

BACKGROUND:

A skilled and stable workforce is essential to the delivery of quality programs for children and families. The consequences of insufficient, inexperienced or poor quality staff are reductions in the effectiveness of programs, the health and safety of children and the capacity to deliver services that meet the needs of the child, family and community.⁴

The quality of the care and education available to children in early childhood services is intrinsically linked to staffing and workforce capacity. The training and qualifications of staff, consistency of staff and staffing arrangements, along with the relationships that staff are able to build with children, families and communities are all central features of a good quality system.

Workforce issues by their nature are complex, multi-faceted, interlinked, dynamic, and manifest in various ways in different communities and in different organisational, cultural and geographic contexts.⁵ In addressing the specific issues for the early childhood workforce, there tends to be very limited research available and most evidence at this stage is largely anecdotal.

However, as the early childhood education and care sector in Australia is undergoing significant reform, clearly these changes will inevitably have major implications for the structure and skilling of the early childhood workforce.

The importance of workforce development and continuous improvement across all areas within the early childhood industry can not be underestimated. This development is key to



achieving the early childhood reform agenda of both Federal and State Governments along with social inclusion and economic development priorities to which Australian governments are committed.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

The following issues have been identified as being central to addressing the current and future workforce requirements for early childhood services:

Population growth and increasing demands for childhood professionals

Demand for early childhood services has grown rapidly in recent years, as a result of higher birth rates, more women participating in the workforce, expansion of early childhood service provision, and the increasing complexity of support requirements amongst children and families.

In the City of Greater Geelong, birth rates have increased significantly over the past 10 years, with a 21 per cent increase in the number of children born across the City of Greater Geelong. The increase in the population of young children is expected to continue to grow, creating demand for additional services and early childhood staff beyond existing levels.

Early childhood services will have an ongoing need to recruit more staff to meet the growing demand from a larger population and the increasing requirements of families. An increased emphasis on early intervention, and awareness of the importance of early childhood engagement, will all contribute to the future need for a much larger and highly skilled early childhood workforce, along with the provision of additional staff in areas of particular professional expertise such as specialist services to support children with additional needs.

As the early childhood workforce grows so will the need to increase management capacity and infrastructure. This places an immense financial burden on all levels of government and the community that will require sustained support.

Existing and future workforce shortages.

One of the most pressing challenges currently facing early childhood services across Australia is the shortage of qualified early childhood staff. This problem is particularly evident within rural and regional communities, such as the City of Greater Geelong and surrounding communities. Workforce shortages in early childhood services impact directly on the quality and consistency of care and outcomes for children, and on the stability and capacity of early childhood providers to provide quality services.

The 2006 National Children's Services Workforce Study estimated a shortage of 7,320 childcare workers nationally by 2013.

There are many factors that contribute to both existing and future projected labour shortages across the early childhood service sector:

- low uptake, high drop out and limited number of newly qualified graduates;
- complex training pathways and recognition assessment processes in order to gain qualifications;
- high staff turnover;
- perceived limited career opportunities;



- demarcation and disparity between child care qualifications, pay and conditions those in early childhood education;
- poor professional status and standing within the community;
- fragmented and poor uptake of in-service training, professional development and support;
- uncoordinated, fragmented and poorly resourced sector infrastructure; and
- low pay and conditions.

Being able to accurately quantify the extent of current workforce shortages across the multiple services and professional disciplines that comprise early childhood services is very difficult. The lack of specific research data contributes to this difficulty, however, increasingly early childhood and family support services are reporting problems in filling staff vacancies and available positions.

Early childhood services are in general very labour intensive, so the way in which services are staffed and how staff capacity is sustained, have significant implications for children and families, managers and practitioners, policy-makers, and the wider community.

In August 2010, the City of Greater Geelong's Economic Development Unit conducted a survey of regional skill shortages. The survey aimed to develop a better understanding of the range and extent of skill shortages that exist throughout the Geelong Region (City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, Golden Plains Shire, and Borough of Queenscliffe).

While the survey did not specifically consider the early childhood workforce, it did however identify that over half of the reported existing local skill shortages were in the health care and social assistance sectors.⁷

A further investigation conducted last year by the City of Greater Geelong in relation to the implementation of UAECE amongst local kindergarten services suggests that at least 24 additional EFT kindergarten teachers will be required at an estimated cost of between \$1.8 million to \$3 million per annum in order to meet service requirements.⁸ (These estimates will be refined once the operating patterns and program models for each kindergarten have been determined).

This estimate is additional to any new kindergarten services that will need to be developed to meet increasing population requirements, or the need to replace existing staff through retirement or departure from the industry, along with the employment of qualified kindergarten teachers in long day care in response to new service regulations.

In common with all areas of early childhood and family support services, Maternal and Child Health nursing faces an acute shortage of practitioners. A workforce assessment of MCH nursing requirements conducted in 2004 predicted shortages of 139 EFT by 2011 with 77 EFT from the rural areas.⁹

The City of Greater Geelong has increasingly experienced difficulties in recruiting qualified MCH nurses to fill vacancies and has instituted a range of new incentives in an endeavour to address workforce issues in the MCH service including a scholarship program.

Evidence suggests that enhanced qualifications required for MCH nursing could be a contributing factor, including the cost of university study and the reality that many students who are Acute Clinical Nurses or clinical nurse specialists are likely to suffer significant pay losses (including superannuation, salary sacrifice and the inability to transfer other entitlements such as long service leave from the public hospital system to local government) if they choose to become MCH nurses. This clearly becomes a major disincentive for nurses who may otherwise be interested in pursuing a career in maternal and child health.



The positive response to Local Government's initiative of providing sponsorships to study MCH nursing, suggests that offering financial assistance for midwives to upgrade qualifications to qualify to practice as an MCH nurse may provide a suitable incentive to encourage more applicants and address existing workforce shortages.

Workforce shortages are not however limited to kindergarten and MCH services and reflect broader workforce issues within the early childhood and health industries in general.

The Family Day Care workforce faces a number of issues shared with other service providers in the child care industry, such as problems with recruitment of new carers and coordination staff (especially in rural and remote areas), remuneration and retention of existing workers, difficulty accessing professional development and training, and a generally low status and standing in the community. Recruitment of foster carers in out of home support services has also been identified as an increasing problem, along with various other relevant occupations including: child care, social work, child protection, paediatrics, speech pathology, general medical practitioners, public dental services, and family service project workers.

Staff shortages and instability in the early childhood workforce contributes to:

- Excessive provider costs due to the continuous recruiting and training of new staff, along with increased use of casual temping and contract staff resulting in higher costs;
- Large workloads for existing staff, inadequate supervision and less time for new staff to learn their jobs;
- Instability and poor image of the sector as a career option, and
- Reduced quality and consistency of services provided for children and families.

Additional investment and new approaches will be required to address workforce shortages across the early childhood industry. Such approaches could include employment of groups of peripatetic early childhood teachers at a regional or local level to support kindergartens and child care centres with on curriculum development, transition, as well as other quality issues.

Isolated rural communities

Early childhood services operating in rural and regional locations across Australia face a range of additional challenges in relation to the early childhood workforce, exacerbated by distance, isolation, and limited support. Recruitment and retention difficulties of suitably trained early childhood staff are consistently apparent in the most remote isolated areas, but increasingly large regional centres such as the City of Greater Geelong are also encountering similar problems.

Working in rural areas can often be more challenging than is the case in metropolitan areas due to the limited range of services available, lack of professional support and resources available, and the additional demands of operating in an isolated context.

Workers in rural areas tend to have less access to resources to assist them cope with the pressures and requirements of various areas of service delivery, including supervision, training, administration and management. 'Rural staff commonly work in smaller organisations, and do not have the same level of access to peer networks, professional bodies and education providers, and have access to fewer opportunities for lateral movement or promotion.'¹⁰



In rural and remote areas, organisations often need to pay a premium for staff, including support for relocation, thereby increasing the costs of service delivery and the financial burden on organisations.

Continuing high attrition rates

The early childhood workforce characteristically has a high rate of staff turnover in most areas of Australia. While attrition rates for new graduates commencing early childhood teaching are difficult to obtain, conservative estimates suggest that one out of every four teachers do not teach beyond five years – though anecdotal evidence in Australia and research evidence from overseas suggest the real level is likely to be much higher.

The problem of high attrition rates amongst child protection workers has been well reported throughout the media, including the implications for caseload management and the impact on the care of children.

A report released late last year indicates that child protection workers across Australia 'often entered the sector early in their careers (half of professionals entered before they turned 30). However, most did not appear to remain long. Child protection agencies estimated that 27 per cent of their child protection workers had been in their jobs for 1 year or less, and 72 per cent had held their positions for less than 5 years.

The report also indicated that "child protection outlets quite often employed workers without optimal skills, with 39 per cent saying that their most recent professional appointee did not have optimal skills. ¹¹

While there are many possible reasons for the problem of attrition across the early childhood profession, the most prominent are: high levels of stress, poor remuneration and generally low valuing of the profession, staff working in isolation, along with increasing workloads and service demands. Another associated factor may also be as the Australian economy is strong and unemployment is low therefore people have more options for careers and short term employment in industries that are potentially more attractive and better rewarded.

The capacity and sustainability of early childhood services to deliver quality programs and services for young children and families clearly depends on the industry being able to both 'attract' and also 'retain' highly skilled staff.

The cost of staff turnover in financial terms alone is significant for the industry and service operators. High staff attrition rates place increased strain on existing staff and also leave gaps in service provision that can potentially jeopardise both the quality and continuity of service provision.

"At an organisational level, unstable or inappropriate staffing arrangements incur additional direct and indirect costs that compromise service quality, efficiency and sustainability. Direct costs include those that arise from unnecessarily having to select, orient and train new staff, and indirect costs include loss of organisational knowledge, experience and expertise, and reduction in staff morale." ¹²

Challenges of an ageing workforce

The early childhood workforce is ageing. Providers need to attract younger workers and support and maintain older workers. Teachers working in early childhood education along with staff working in professions such as Maternal and Child Health tend on average to be a largely older workforce.



The investigation conducted by the City of Greater Geelong into the workforce requirements for the implementation of UAECE amongst local kindergartens cited earlier in this submission, estimates that approximately 40 per cent of the current kindergarten workforce is aged 50 years and above and is likely to retire within the next 10 years. Only 12 per cent of the existing workforce of kindergarten teachers were aged 30 years and under.

It is likely that the rate of departure of trained kindergarten teachers from the industry will be influenced and possibly even hastened by changes to working conditions and service delivery expectations in conjunction with new government early childhood reforms, that may be perceived as being unfavourable to the existing workforce.

The average age of Council's MCH nurses is 50 years, with approximately 38 per cent of existing staff eligible for retirement.

Workforce growth requirements over the next five years will be affected by the need to replace retiring workers as well as add to the overall number of staff. The departure of older workers from the early childhood workforce is also likely to result in a significant loss of skills, experience and knowledge which will be difficult to replace.

Wages, conditions and job structures

There is a general consensus across the early childhood sector that the low level of remuneration for staff working in the early childhood industry is a major contributing factor in the difficulties of staff recruitment and retention.

The one consistent issue when it comes to pay is that the pay rates do not appropriately reflect the skill, experience, dedication or work of the people working in ECEC. The pay fails to value the work, and fails to provide dedicated workers in the sector, the appropriate return that their professionalism and qualifications justify.¹³

Despite the intense level of responsibility that child care work demands, the industry is characterised by a tension between the high value and importance of the work, and the low remuneration, benefits and status achieved by those actually undertaking the work. Beyond the intrinsic rewards derived from working with children, which may be significant, the pay and working conditions are typically poor.¹⁴

Poor pay, combined with lack of adequate career pathways and restricted career opportunities, and tenuous job security, also contribute to the range of existing workforce challenges across the early childhood industry.

Many staff working in early childhood services have only short term contracts or temporary positions that are subject to being annually renegotiated. The lack of job security and permanency within the early childhood industry is in part the product of the manner in which many programs and services are funded, (especially in relation to the increasing tendency to fund services and projects on a short term basis) along with fluctuating service requirements.

Short term funding commonly leads to innovative and responsive services losing funding after a short period or remaining under constant threat of closure. This pattern of service development and withdrawal has significant effects, not only on communities and families, but also on staff recruitment, retention and professional development.

Consideration must also be given to the issue of under-employment for staff (insufficcient hours) resulting from small and or fluctuating populations and service requirements. Approaches that support options for cross-sector employment need to be developed to provide greater opportunity and security for staff.



Emphasis also needs to be given industrially and professionally to improving the recognition and status of workers in early childhood education. Appropriate recognition to improve the perceived status of early childhood teachers and education workers must be pursued. Such improvements will however inevitably increase operating costs and funding requirements for governments, service operators, and the community.

The implications of new government policies and regulations:

Victoria's Children's Services Regulations 2009 and government commitment to the implementation of universal access to 15 hours of early childhood education will generate significant additional demand for qualified early childhood teachers and educators with a Certificate III or Diploma of Children's Services.

The Bilateral Agreement on UAECE clearly indicates that implementation of 15 hours of kindergarten can only occur if, along with the infrastructure requirements, there is an associated increase in staffing. The Agreement stipulates that to meet compliance the requirements of universal kindergarten access, programs must be taught by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks per year.

"In 2008, approximately 39% of teachers (806 teachers) in state funded kindergarten programs had at least a four year Early Childhood Teaching qualification. Victoria's primary focus is to meet the substantial challenge in recruiting or developing the approximately 600-800 further early childhood teachers required to move from a ten to a 15 hour program by 2013.

While our aspiration is to ensure that over time four-year qualifications are the base level qualification, transitional arrangements as outlined in the National Partnership are required beyond 2013". 15

Victoria will require a substantially larger early childhood workforce by the time the new regulations come into effect in 2014. Demand will be particularly high for early childhood teachers. In addition, the requirement that all staff in licensed children's services will need to hold a minimum Certificate III qualification will require a significant training effort.

The National Quality Agenda being developed through COAG will establish national standards for staff:child ratios and staff qualification requirements that are likely to also create additional demand for early childhood educators.

Early childhood educators working in local kindergarten services throughout the City of Greater Geelong have expressed concern that universal access and the introduction of 15 hours could lead to unwanted 'casualisation' of the industry, as it is likely to create less than a full-time teaching load.

Measures must ensure that 15 hours provision does not lead to unwanted part-time employment, which would have a counter-productive impact on the attraction and retention of kindergarten teachers seeking full time employment, and also the potential adverse impact on the quality of programs provided for young children and families.

Appropriate staffing and rostering models for kindergartens and child care centres will be required which are consistent with and complementary to existing industry awards and employment conditions and the programming requirements of the 15-hours under the universal access initiative.

With the implementation of the Victorian Children's Services Regulations 2009, staff child ratios have been reduced for age groups birth to 35 months from, 1 staff member to 5 children, to 1 staff member to 4 children to be implemented by January 2012. These



changes will result in a necessary increase to the current staffing complement within Council's existing long day care centres and those of other operators across the industry.

The increase in staffing ratio will have a significant impact on the Council's operational budget. It is estimated that the employment of additional staff (excluding overhead costs such as work cover, uniforms, and management expenses) by \$619,000. To offset the cost of the salary increases, fees for families would need to increase by approximately \$25 per week or alternatively available places for children reduced. Either option is however likely to result in adverse implications for local families and higher costs for Council.

These factors combine with a critical shortage of management skills and capacity to deal with increasing demands within early childhood services, including compliance and reporting requirements, governance, administration, finance management, and industrial issues.

Improving investment in training and professional development

Increased opportunities for training early childhood educators will be necessary if the objectives of the government's early childhood reforms are to be achieved and future workforce requirements for early childhood services met. This will need to include increasing capacity in tertiary training and university courses, along with the standards of training currently available.

In 2008, a report published by the Community Services & Health Industry Training Board (Victoria) *Industry Drivers Report 2008*, clearly identified the growing need for Government supported and funded training, particularly in high growth areas such as Children's Services and Community Health. The report also noted that while private investment in training has increased considerably, there are concerns about the high drop-out rate in training due to the time and financial constraints for individuals.

Consultations conducted with local kindergarten services throughout the City of Greater Geelong identified a range of criticisms regarding the level and nature of existing training provided for early childhood educators, including: the adequacy of existing competency assessments; the quality of course and training content; the level of support provided to students; and limited opportunities for students to gain practical experience.

Without significant government support to elevate training standards, along with accompanying measures to support pay increases in the sector, there is a genuine concern that the future viability of kindergarten and child care services and their capacity to meet the requirements of universal access along with other government early childhood reforms.

The changes to be introduced in relation to universal access also risk potential alienation of existing and committed staff who have 'kept the sector going'. It is feared that dedicated staff working in kindergarten services with high levels of experience, but low levels of formal qualifications could potentially be displaced.

There is also the possibility of inequality being created due to different awards, entitlements and conditions between staff working across different streams of employment, including pay levels, planning time, holidays, etc. This would result in the emergence of a very divided and potentially hierarchical staffing structure within early childhood education and care services, that may perpetuate longstanding differences between 'education' and 'care' services and the staff working in these professions.

The move to higher skill levels and qualifications in early childhood education and care services, albeit welcomed, is also likely to impact on the economic structure and capacity of early childhood services. Higher skills inevitably mean increased wages, which must be met through either fee contributions or government funding.¹⁶ This creates a further disincentive



due to the lack of capacity within funding regimes and industrial instruments to reflect higher level skills attained in rates of pay; so, even where higher level qualifications are available, they are not taken up.

Limited funding regimes and tight operational budgets already create significant problems for early childhood services in the up-skilling of the workforce. While the development of new training opportunities are welcomed, the lack of casual short-staffing and funding resources mean on-the-job training cannot be easily accommodated and back-filled, especially in smaller organisations.

Equally, a highly 'compliant' industry culture can have the unintended effect of steering training away from innovative approaches to practice, towards skills that are based on adherence to regulatory standards. In this context, the scope for considering and encouraging new areas of knowledge, practice and skill for the industry are constrained.¹⁷

This includes the need to carefully consider the structure and content of existing training/courses available for early childhood teachers and early childhood educators in relation to working with vulnerable/disadvantaged children and families.

There seems to be an existing gap in the training and preparation of early childhood staff across a range of professions in being able to respond to the increasing complex needs of children and families, along with the associated dynamics within the service environment, which may in turn be a contributing factor in the difficulties already referred to above in relation to workforce retention across the sector.

Closer linkages and integration is required between tertiary training institutions and early childhood service providers to ensure training is relevant and related to current and emerging service delivery requirements and priorities.

The need improve workforce diversity

The early childhood industry is one of the most highly gendered of occupations. In all countries where information exists, work in the early childhood industry is overwhelmingly undertaken by women and where men are employed it is usually one (or two) in an otherwise female environment.

Around 98.5 per cent of workers in early childhood education and care are female. Amongst the 370 early childhood staff employed by the City of Greater Geelong, only 3 (0.8 per cent) are male and these staff are not engaged in direct service delivery roles with children.

There are clear reasons for the continuing bias toward a female dominated workforce that are deeply rooted both in history, community perceptions, and employment values. The profile of the early childhood workforce does not however reflect the structure of most families and the importance of engaging men more actively in the role of caring for young children.

Equally the early childhood workforce across Greater Geelong lacks ethnic diversity. Improving the cultural profile of the workforce is also important, because capacity to speak languages other than English enables practitioners to connect with, and deliver services to culturally diverse communities.

More could be done to encourage and support the diversification of the workforce and enhance the potential benefits which children and specific communities may derive from achieving such goals.

Specific workforce reforms and incentives are required and should include new strategies to recruit more male staff and also staff from CALD and indigenous communities, along with



providing financial support for further training and education of bilingual practitioners already working in children's services.

Fragmentation and the need to transform workforce culture

The structuring of the early childhood workforce reflects the structure of ECEC. In most areas across Australia responsibility for early childhood service provision, funding and policy is shared between various government departments, including health, education, and community services.

The fragmentation of service delivery and responsibility is characteristically created by:

- The diversity of services provided, which is often accompanied by divisions of responsibility between different government portfolios.
- The various levels of government (local/municipal; state/provincial; and national) that have a direct policy impact on early childhood services.
- Discontinuities between early childhood provision and other areas of early childhood, education, and family policy and services.
- The diverse mixture of service providers government, not-for-profit, nongovernment organisations, and for-profit businesses and corporations.
- Differing standards, regulations, and industrial requirements according to jurisdiction and /or type of early childhood service.
- Early childhood services are covered by a plethora of different industrial agreements and award conditions. This contributes to inconsistency between conditions of employment e.g. health staff employed through public hospital setting and local government (salary packaging options), etc.

The issues referred to above (amongst many others) make it particularly difficult to develop a cohesive, well-coordinated, and equitable approach to workforce planning, development and funding.

As a new culture emerges and the approach toward the development of a more integrated service delivery gathers momentum new workforce developments and training will be required.

A flexible workforce will be required that consists of a pool of personnel with disparate professional identities and educational backgrounds who have flexible skill sets that are shared and transferable across a range of service provision, while supported by staff that have particular areas of specialised expertise.

Complex family issues and increasing workload requirements for ECEC staff

Increasingly early childhood services and staff are working with children and families experiencing complex parenting, social, physical and mental health issues/problems. This requires staff to have a more sophisticated and comprehensive skill set beyond the primary focus required by the core requirements within their area of service delivery.

Children with additional needs, including: children with a disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and indigenous children need additional consideration when attending a children's service.

'If the complex needs of families today are to be met, a coordinated and coherent approach is necessary. This approach requires new ways of working that are neither multidisciplinary nor interdisciplinary but are trans-disciplinary.'18



The service structure and current funding models within early childhood services do not adequately support care that reflects the individual needs of children, especially those with complex support requirements. This places additional demands on early childhood staff, who do not always have the capacity through training or available resources to address the particular needs of children and families involved with early childhood services. Consequently workload requirements often increase beyond reasonable expectations for staff, and waiting lists for access to early intervention and support services for children and families are also extended.

Increasing workload demands that are not well resourced or managed contribute to a stressful work environment that has negative implications for staff retention. Equally, quality outcomes for children and families with complex needs cannot be achieved unless well trained staff and appropriate resources and are provided and sustained.

Workplace development and planning in early childhood services needs to be able to ensure the right professionals are in the right locations, particularly in the context of working with highly disadvantaged and vulnerable populations of children and families.

At the local level, facilitating trans-disciplinary team approaches to improving children's health, education and early development outcomes can take advantage of different interests, skill sets, available resources, and professional perspectives, within a group of local professionals, while also distributing the workload burden more equitably across organisations.

"Where team skill sets are missing, particular specialties or knowledge that is essential for the advancement of local educational outcomes can be set in place to augment the team, build individual skills or provide further professional development.

Such approaches can optimise the use of new technologies, encourage diverse local solutions, build community connections and enhance respect for previously - untapped local knowledge and skills. These capabilities are fundamental to improving the educational outcomes of children in regional and remote locations.

Training early childhood professionals to work with children and families with complex needs helps to build understanding and increase family engagement and participation in early childhood programs. The continuity of children's experiences within early childhood services is clearly enhanced when families and teachers collaborate and adopt consistent approaches to behaviour management, learning and development." ¹⁹

It is important that professional training provides skills and awareness on issues of cultural competence and resources to enable negotiation and translation where necessary. Achieving good outcomes for children and families with complex needs is contingent upon well resourced services that employ staff with appropriate training, skills and support resources.

Other issues identified in response to the discussion paper

While the contents of the Early Childhood Discussion Paper canvasses a broad range of issues the following matters do not appear to be have been identified or adequately addressed in the discussion on workforce issues:

The importance of playgroups has not be identified amongst the range of early childhood services referred to in the Early Childhood Discussion Pape, especially in relation to the increasing focus on delivery of facilitated playgroups by early childhood professionals, and the particular skill sets and training that such work requires.



The City of Greater Geelong has over 80 registered playgroups that engaged a large number of paid professional and volunteer parent facilitators required to coordinate and conduct appropriate playgroup programs. The important role and function of playgroup and pre-kinder activity programs need to be recognised.

The challenges for the early childhood workforce in relation to not for profit and for profit providers both operating in the same sector and being able to provide a cohesive and consistent approach to addressing workforce issues and requirements. Differing employment conditions for staff, along with training and operating requirements create a challenging landscape in appropriately planning workforce development at the local level.

CONCLUSION

There are clearly a broad range of increasing challenges facing the early childhood industry that will require significant investment and attention in workforce development.²⁰ There are compelling reasons for concern about the future capacity and sustainability of early childhood services unless there is increased and concerted efforts applied by all levels of government and industry leaders beyond the scope of the current range of initiatives.

Strategies need to be developed that are comprehensive and coordinated across all sectors and professions associated with the early childhood industry, to ensure the adequacy of supply for the future needs of early childhood services, and to meet the objectives of the government's early childhood reform agenda.

There is a great deal that can be done at the policy level and across the sector to address workforce issues in a more strategic way. However, these developments need to be informed by better understanding of the issues through research-based evidence regarding both current and future workforce requirements.

Strategies are also required to ensure the delivery of improved qualifications and training outcomes, remuneration rates and career opportunities, and professional standing within the community.

Finally, ensuring adequacy of funding to meet the requirements of investment in training and improving recognition for staff across the early childhood industry is imperative if the workforce is to be developed and sustained. The capacity of early childhood services is unlikely to meet future requirements unless there is increased investment by all stakeholders.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following provides a summary of recommendations for consideration by the Productivity Commission.

- Implementation of comprehensive workforce development strategies for early childhood services in concert with State and Local Governments, along with key industry bodies and training organisations.
- Improvements to pay rates and employment conditions for all early childhood teachers and educators
- Review the content of existing training/ courses available to early childhood teachers and educators in relation to working with vulnerable/disadvantaged children and families.



- Investment in comprehensive post qualification professional development training programs.
- Development of a framework for scholarships and enhanced payment to attract and support staff working in disadvantaged and rural communities.
- Employment of groups of peripatetic early childhood teachers at a regional or local level to support kindergartens and child care centres on curriculum development, transition, as well as other quality issues.
- Improve the profile and status of the early childhood workforce.
- Review the criteria, including improved standards for registration of private Registered Training Organisations.

REFERENCES

¹ National Children's Services Workforce Project 2006.

¹⁸ Real prospects for early childhood intervention: Family aspirations and professional implications. Carpenter, B. (page 31) (2005).



² Strategic Assessment of the Children's Services Industry. A paper prepared for the Children's Services Subcommittee of the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council Government of South Australia, 2009.

³ Population data supplied by ID Consulting Pty Ltd, http://forecast2.id.com.au

⁴ The Virtual Village: Raising a Child in the New Millennium. Report of the Inquiry into Early Childhood Services (2005), page 147, South Australia (http://ecsinquiry.sa.gov.au).

⁵ Workforce issues across the family relationship services sector: Models, responses and strategies. Cortis, N; Chan, S; & Hilferty, F. (2009).

⁶ ACT Children's Services Workforce Issues Report. Prepared for the ACT Children's Service Forum by the Children's Services Workforce Sub-Committee. September 2008.

⁷ Geelong Region Skill Shortages Report. Economic Development Unit, City of Greater Geelong (October 2010).

⁸ Universal Access to Early Childhood Education: 15 hours Kindergarten What It Means for the City of Greater Geelong. Final Summary Report. City of Greater Geelong. 2010.

⁹ Maternal and Child Health Workforce Project to Support Recruitment and Retention. Municipal Association of Victoria Submission. Fagan, S. (2005).

¹⁰ Workforce issues across the family relationship services sector. (2009).

¹¹ Who Works in Community Services? A profile of Australian workforces in child protection, juvenile justice, disability services and general community services. Martin, B. & Healy, J. August 2010.

¹² Workforce issues across the family relationship services sector: (2009).

¹³ Big Steps in Child Care, Early Childhood Wages Key to delivering quality and continuity. Big Steps in Childcare Campaign. Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU). 2010.

¹⁴ Workforce development in early childhood education and care. Workplace Research Centre, University of Sydney. Bretherton, T. 2010

¹⁵ Victorian/Commonwealth Bilateral Agreement on Achieving Access to Early Childhood Education (page 8). 2009.

¹⁶ Developing the child care workforce: Understanding 'fight' or 'flight' amongst workers. Bretherton, T. Workplace research centre. University of Sydney, 2010.

¹⁷ Workforce development in early childhood education and care. 2010.

¹⁹ Review of Educational Practice in Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1. Provision in Western Australia: Synthesis of Findings. Tayler, C. (page 4) 2010.

²⁰ Recruitment and Retention in the Community Sector: A snapshot of current concerns, future trends and workforce strategies. Victorian Council of Social Service. 2007.