

Early Childhood Development Workforce Productivity Commission Issues Paper

Submission by KU Children's Services

Introduction

KU Children's Services is the leading not for profit provider of children's services in Australia and the second largest provider overall. KU was the first provider of early childhood education and care in Australia and has operated continuously since 1895.

Our Vision is: *Every family is able to access affordable, high quality early childhood education and care for their children.*

KU operates over 150 early childhood education and care services and programs in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and in the ACT. These services include, long day care, preschool, occasional care, vacation care, out of school hours care, family programs, early intervention, child care for newly arrived migrants and an Aboriginal support program. We enrol over 14,200 children each year from 12,800 families and employ around 2,200 staff. KU is also the National Inclusion Support Program Provider for the Australian Government.

KU welcomes the COAG ECEC reforms and the proposed streamlining of regulations and quality standards and offers to speak to members of the Commission on the matters addressed in this submission.

Comments on Specific Issues

"Childcare" and "Preschool".

- KU believes the distinction made in the report between "childcare" and "preschool" is not reflective of current approaches to contemporary high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, ECEC professional organisations and ECEC universities.
- KU has long held the belief that quality ECEC for young children in prior to school settings occurs in all service types if the pedagogical leader is an early childhood University qualified teacher.
- This belief is reflected in KU's workforce where our staffing standards require the following:
 - An ECEC University qualified teacher in both our long day care and preschool services regardless of the size of the service and the requirements of the jurisdiction they are operating in.
 - A minimum of a two year TAFE qualification (or equivalent) for the leaders in our occasional care services, vacation care programs and the Adult Migrant Education Program.
 - A specialist OOSH two year Diploma for the leaders of our outside of school hours care programs.
 - An ECEC teaching qualification plus additional qualifications in special education for the pedagogical leader and consultants in our early intervention programs. (All staff in our specialist long day care centre catering for 20 children per day with autism are currently undertaking additional training in the Early Start Denver Model).
 - The employment of speech pathologists, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists in our early intervention programs and our family programs as required.
- NSW has been in a fortunate position for many years, as the NSW regulations require the employment of an ECEC teacher in centre based services where there are more than 29

licensed places for children under the age of six years. This has resulted in an expectation and an acknowledgement that the education and care of young children occurs in all centre based service types regardless of the operational hours or the number of weeks the service is provided.

Responses to Issues Outlined in the Paper

The following responses are based on KU's experience and we have chosen to only comment on the questions where we feel we have expertise and are relevant to our organisation.

Given the terms of reference, is the suggested scope of the ECD workforce appropriate for the purposes of this study? (Page 5)

- KU feels strongly that the inclusion of children with additional needs and CALD backgrounds into mainstream services is an ideal model as long as there are sufficient support services and resources available to the staff in these services.
- The current practice of minimal funding to mainstream services to include children with a range of high support developmental and medical needs is largely inadequate. As a result, organisations or individual services that are committed to the inclusion of children with additional needs pay dearly for their beliefs and practices. The more children are included, the higher the cost and the larger the deficit that services carries.
- The issue of Aboriginal children is much more complex – in large Aboriginal communities it may be better to establish a specific service for Aboriginal children and their families and it is ideal if the staff are Aboriginal with the appropriate ECEC qualifications. In other inclusive mainstream settings (mixed communities), the Aboriginal culture needs to be reflected and respected within the service's curriculum as other cultural similarities and differences are reflected. In both situations, it is ideal if the staff are Aboriginal with the appropriate ECEC qualifications.

Which ECD services for children with additional needs should the Commission include in this study? (Page 5)

- The Commission needs to include all integrated services in this study that cater for young children in the years before they commence formal schooling. This includes all mainstream ECEC settings (ie preschools, long day care, vacation care and out of school hours care) where much of the educational service delivery for children with additional needs occurs and is largely overlooked and underfunded. (For example, the Commission needs to include the ECEC services in the ACT Government created early childhood schools).

What are some other examples of integrated and co-located services? What are the benefits and limitations of integrating and co-locating ECD services? (Page 5)

- KU in partnership with the South West Area Health, University of NSW and the Benevolent Society was successful in winning the tender for the establishment of the first Australian Government funded autism specific long day care centre in NSW. In establishing this service, KU demolished its existing preschool building and integrated the preschool into the new building which houses both the KU Liverpool Preschool and the KU Marcia Burgess Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre (MBASELCC).
- The autism part of the new building was funded by the Australian Government and the preschool section was funded by KU.
- The funding for the autism program is for a period of three years and the preschool receives NSW Community Services preschool funding.
- In establishing this new building with two programs operating within, KU was mindful of the importance of the children in both programs having some time together throughout the day and helping families to feel they are part of one whole centre.
- The centre has one Centre Manager who is an ECEC qualified teacher that oversees the two programs and is responsible for the overall operation of the centre.

- Currently, the staff in the autism program are undertaking specialist training in the Early Start Denver Model and the staff in the preschool have attended preliminary training so that they gain a greater understanding of the particular approach being taken. This has assisted the staff in the preschool as it is expected that some of the children attending the autism program will also attend the preschool program on other days.
- To date we have found the centre to be challenging but very workable even though the staff in both programs are paid under different enterprise agreements and terms and conditions.
- Staff in the autism program include: two ECEC teachers, qualified child care workers, unqualified child care workers, a Speech Pathologist, a Psychologist, an Occupational Therapist, a Paediatrician and a specialist behaviour analyst ECEC teacher. The paediatrician, psychologist and researcher are employed by our partner organisations but costed into the centre budget.
- Staff in the preschool include: an ECEC teacher and an unqualified child care worker with an additional unqualified part time support worker to assist the staff with the inclusion of children with additional needs.
- The research component of the project will identify the benefits of this co-located model as well as the limitations; however, now that the centre is becoming established and roles and responsibilities have been clarified, we anticipate that the outcomes will be positive for the children and families.

In terms of the Preschool workforce, does this provide comprehensive coverage of formal childcare settings? Is this an adequate representation of the broad roles and responsibilities of childcare and preschool workers? What characteristics describe the childcare and preschool workforces – in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies and job satisfaction? (Page 7)

- KU has its own enterprise agreements for staff employed as teachers and child care workers.
- The agreement for teachers includes teachers employed in long day care, preschool and early intervention services.
- The agreement for child care workers covers both qualified and unqualified staff working in either long day care, preschool, OOSH, occasional care and vacation care services.
- Within our agreements, KU has chosen to pay our staff employed on long day care conditions at a higher rate of pay than preschool staff in recognition of the longer hours and additional weeks of work.
- Within NSW, KU's industrial agreements are used as a benchmark for other employers in the community based sector and we generally aim our salary rates higher than the community based sector.
- Staff turnover within KU, is lower than the sector average (approx 20%) and has decreased gradually over the last several years:
 - › 2007: 22%
 - › 2008: 19.2%
 - › 2009: 15.3%
- Currently, KU's workforce is aging with the majority of long term staff working in preschools.
- Our long day care services have a younger group of staff and our staff turnover is higher in long day care.
- The status of our staff as of May 2010 included:
 - › 45% of our permanent staff held a Diploma or above
 - › 26% of our child care workers held a Cert 111 qualification or were working towards that qualification
 - › Except for one preschool service, all KU preschools and long day care services have an ECEC University qualified teacher as the pedagogical leader of the service.

- All KU staff benefit from our strong commitment to professional learning through our extensive professional development program provided within KU and are also supported financially to attend external professional development courses, workshops and conferences.
- KU's enterprise agreements are available publicly and give an indication of the salary rates and allowances paid.
- There is concern in the community based sector about the introduction of the Modern Award as the salary rates are lower for University and TAFE qualified staff than existing awards or agreements.
- Generally, staff that choose to work in the ECEC prior to school sector are intrinsically motivated as they genuinely want to make a difference to the lives of young children and gain satisfaction when they see a child develop through the outcomes of the play based curriculum provided and the expertise of the staff.
- One of the great challenges for community based service providers in NSW is the fact that ECEC teachers in community based services (preschool and long day care) are paid significantly less than their colleagues working in school settings. (Approx 12% less in comparison to KU's salary rates which are generally higher than the sector).
- Additionally, the NSW Government funds community based preschools through the NSW Human Services, Community Services and also 100 preschools through the Department of Education and Training (DET). The significant difference in the fees paid by families in community based preschools and DET preschools are grossly inequitable. Additionally, ECEC teachers employed in DET preschools are paid the same salary rates as DET teachers.
- The community based sector cannot compete with the DET salaries as any increase in salaries in the community based sector are passed on directly to families through their fees. This is mainly because of the differences in funding provided to DET preschools and the community based sector. Some of this discrepancy is being addressed through the NSW Government's Preschool Investment and Reform Plan (PIRP), however community based preschool fees in NSW for 2011 are closer to \$50 per day which makes it still the most expensive State for families wanting to access a preschool service for their child in the year before they start school. Generally fees in DET preschools range from \$3.00 to approximately \$12.00 per day.
- Anecdotally, it appears that the majority of new ECEC University graduates chose to start their career in the school system and until we raise the status and standing of ECEC teachers in the prior to school sector through pay parity this situation will remain.

What characteristics describe the workforce that provides services to children with additional needs – in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies and job satisfaction? (Page 8)

- KU has approximately 300 unqualified child care workers who are employed part time on a contractual basis to work in our preschools and long day care services to support children with additional needs.
- Generally, a large number of these staff have remained with KU for many years even though their employment is based on the number of children with additional needs in each service and may change from term to term or quarterly.
- Currently, KU subsidises the employment of our support staff by \$216,000 annually (\$46,000 in preschools and \$170,000 in long day care services) as both the Commonwealth and State funding does not cover the hourly rate of pay for these staff.
- Support staff within KU are employed under the same enterprise agreements as our other staff and are paid the same salary rates as the agreement requires.

What data collections provide information on the ECD sector and its workforce? How might these data collections be improved? (Page 8)

- Until there is one consistent data collection system implemented nationally, there will continue to be great gaps in collecting this information.

How do the differing roles and policies of governments affect the planning and provision of the ECD workforce? (Page 10)

- In the past, the varying policies, regulations and legislative requirements for ECEC services have differed greatly between the States and Territories and this situation has resulted in no consistency in planning and no clear body responsible for it.
- KU welcomes the COAG reforms and the new national regulatory framework and we anticipate that some of the previous difficulties will be solved.
- KU is also pleased to see that preschool services are required to participate in the National Quality Standards and Rating System as we have been lobbying for such a system for preschools in NSW for many years.
- We also want to see preschools in NSW made more affordable for families so that access to a high quality preschool program will be available to our most disadvantaged children and families.

Are there examples of jurisdictions or councils with effective policies and programs that could be usefully transferred and applied in other areas of Australia? (Page 10)

- NSW has a higher standard than the new National Quality Standards in terms of the requirement for ECEC University qualified teachers and the staff to child ratios for children aged from 3 years to 6 years.

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? (Page 14)

- KU believes that generally higher staff qualifications and staff to child ratios will result in a higher quality service and better outcomes for children. Research supports this view and also identifies staff consistency, professional development support, pedagogical leadership, sound governance/management and group sizes as being indicators of a high quality service for young children.
- It is interesting to note that the University qualified teaching qualifications are a “given” in the school setting and yet in the ECEC prior to school sector this is still being debated. There would be few Australian families that would choose to send their child to a school that did not employ appropriately qualified teachers.

What options are available for funding the increased wages and salaries of more highly qualified ECD workers? (Page 15)

- The Modern Award needs to be adjusted to ensure that a 4 year ECEC University qualification has a higher salary rate than a 3 year qualification.
- Increased salary costs for teachers in ECEC prior to school settings cannot be met by increased fees to families. If the Australian community values the early years and the work that ECEC staff undertake, then it needs to be supported by the whole community through increased Government funding.

How will increased fertility rates, changing family structures, the introduction of paid parental leave and other demographic, social and policy factors affect the demand for ECD services and ECD workers? (Page 15)

The demand for ECEC services is unlikely to change unless there is an unexpected rise or fall in the birth rates. For many working families, childcare is an essential service. Preschool in NSW is still unaffordable for many of our disadvantaged families who may not be in the workforce full time.

The introduction of the COAG 15 hour universal access to a preschool program is an example of a policy that is difficult to implement in NSW where children attend a 6 or 7 hour full day program.

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? (Page 16)

- The only exceptions we have to our own staffing standards are in two services, one on NSW and the other in the ACT:
 - The service in NSW is in a small isolated North Coast preschool where the Director holds a two year TAFE qualification. This exception is because at the time KU took over the service we could not attract an ECEC teacher to the position. We are currently expanding the service and will be employing an additional staff member with an ECEC University qualification.
 - In the ACT we have experienced difficulty in attracting an ECEC qualified teacher to the Directors' position in our one long day care service in that jurisdiction. This appears to be because in the ACT teachers are not required in the regulations for long day care services and most of the ECEC qualified teachers find employment in preschools which are administered by the Education Department.
- As a member of a large number of forums and reference groups, KU is aware that there is difficulty in attracting ECEC University qualified teachers in regional and remote areas.

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? (Page 16)

- See our comments on page 4 and 5 of this submission.

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? (Page 16)

- As stated earlier, KU retains some staff for many years and this is generally because of the following factors:
 - KU's own enterprise agreements which pay staff at a higher rate than other community based service providers
 - KU's Professional Development Program which offers extensive opportunities for staff to further their professional knowledge, skills and expertise
 - Career opportunities within KU for existing staff such as transfers to other service types or geographical locations
 - Secondments to other positions for block periods of time
 - Family friendly work policies for staff
 - Professional support and infrastructure

What are the key factors influencing an individual's decision to work in the ECD sector? (Page 17)

- Comments from KU staff about why they chose to work in the prior to school ECEC sector include:
 - Wanting to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families
 - The close relationships that are developed with children, families and colleagues
 - The attraction of a play based curriculum and the ability to follow children's interests

- › The love of creative arts
- › The flexibility in the routine of the day in a centre
- › The intrinsic value of observing the growth and development of young children
- › The ability to work within a team rather than being one teacher in a classroom of children
- › The opportunity to work with the majority of children and their families for more than one year
- › The opportunity to work with other agencies to support children with additional needs
- › The opportunity to create rich learning environments both indoors and outdoors

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? (Page 17)

- KU believes that staff working with children in the early years are largely undervalued by the wider community and sometimes by their colleagues working in primary school or secondary schools.
- In the ECEC prior to school sector, the salary costs of a centre budget within KU are slightly higher than 80% of the total budget. Most of this cost is passed onto families through their daily fees and for some families this is unaffordable (particularly in preschools where families are not eligible for CCB or the tax rebate).
- As stated earlier, the Government needs to support teachers in ECEC settings by making a significant contribution to these costs.

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? (Page 17)

- The role of ECEC staff has diversified and become more complex in recent years. The role is not only reaching young children, but also being the first port of call for many families with complex problems as well as compliance with many legislative requirements.
- Many ECEC services are isolated and do not have the necessary support systems in place to assist them when needed.
- Many community based services have a voluntary parent management committee which could change annually and also take on the role of the employer. This on its own makes the roles of the staff more complex and demanding.

Do newly-qualified ECD workers have the necessary skills and attributes to be effective in the workplace? (Page 19)

- As the role of staff in ECEC becomes more complex and diverse it is expected that newly qualified staff will not have the experience to deal with all the situations they will face, however, their tertiary training will equip them to undertake the basic requirements of their role.
- KU believes it is important to have support systems in place to assist new staff.
- On-going professional development is crucial for staff

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? (Page 19)

- Within KU staff are remunerated according to their qualification up to the obtainment of a four year ECEC University qualification. However, staff with additional post graduate qualifications such as Masters Degrees or Graduate Diplomas are not recognised.

Do you consider professional status to be an issue for the ECD workforce? What factors determine professional status in the sector? (Page 20)

- See our previous comments regarding the status and standing of ECEC staff in prior to school settings.

How might a change in status be achieved? What would be the effects of such a change? (Page 20)

- Pay parity for ECEC teachers in prior to school settings with their teaching colleagues in primary and secondary schools.
- Teacher registration as national requirement

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

- Until the supply is increased, KU would like to see Government introduce some incentives to motivate current staff to update their qualifications.
- Such incentives could include: scholarships, paid allowances or the waiving of the HECS fees.

Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector? (Page 20)

- The rapid growth of fast tracking RTO's has resulted in some courses not providing sufficient course content and support for students. This has resulted in poor quality graduates.

What can be done to ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled trainers to meet future increases in demand for training? (Page 20)

- See comments above.

Have initiatives to increase the supply of ECD workers been effective? (Page 21)

- Recent incentives for TAFE students and graduating teachers electing to work in rural and remote areas have helped but is not enough to meet the demand.

Will workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the ECD sector? (Page 21)

- Some KU staff will leave the sector, whilst others may choose to upgrade their qualifications.
- KU values our most experienced child care workers and is concerned that we may lose these staff if strategies such as recognition of prior learning and workplace assessment are not introduced.

What strategies are being used to attract ECD workers from Indigenous communities and to build Indigenous workforce capability? How effective are these strategies? (Page 23)

- KU employs a dedicated Aboriginal Consultant to support the inclusion of Aboriginal children and their families in KU services. This support is also extended to Aboriginal staff.

How appropriate are the remuneration and conditions for ECD workers for children with additional needs? (Page 24)

- See earlier comments regarding the funding of support workers and children with additional needs.

To what extent are workers from CALD backgrounds represented in the ECD sector? (Page 24)

- KU employs a number of staff from CALD backgrounds in our mainstream services and our AMEP services to support children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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? (Page 24)

- The OECD Report *Starting Strong* (2006) gives an overview of the provision of ECEC services across many countries.
- KU believes there are lessons to be learnt from the Nordic countries whereby the importance of the early years is valued by whole societies and supported by Government.