

Submission by SDN Children's Services

Early Childhood Development Workforce

Productivity Commission Issues Paper

SDN was established in 1905 and is one of Australia's most experienced and trusted leaders in children's services, providing early education and care, and family support programs. We are a not-for-profit organisation operating 23 Children's Education and Care Centres in NSW and the ACT for more than 3000 children. We also operate 16 government-funded programs for children, families and the children's services sector, including early intervention, Aboriginal community programs, and autism and disability support services.

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

Yes

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

Some examples of services are early intervention, Hospital Early Childhood Programs and supported playgroups. It is also important to define the difference between early intervention for children at risk and early intervention for specialist education for children with disabilities. These two terms are often used interchangeably, but refer to two different groups of children.

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

The benefits of integrating services include taking a holistic approach to supporting the interconnected needs of children and families, so that children get the best chance they can to develop optimally; professionally it is valuable to have multidisciplinary teams working together (health research shows better information exchange, decision-making and outcomes when multiple health professionals work together - every reason to believe this would also be true in ECD sector).

An example of a limitation of co-location is knowledge of child development. For example, the current UWS social work degree doesn't teach child development as a core subject.

- 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)

There is no mention in the paper of the 'back-end' administration team supporting the contact staff (unless they are included in "other workers"); while not the focus of this inquiry, the workload undertaken by these people has a direct bearing on how much administrative load is carried by the contact staff. SDN and other larger providers due to their size have the ability to provide this corporate service function.

The list of occupations (p7) doesn't refer to senior early childhood advisory roles that SDN employs. These positions play a valuable role in providing mentoring/leadership to our centre directors. The provision of this corporate service function and senior advisory roles we believe provides greater job satisfaction for centre based staff as they know they have the support from other disciplines to perform their role.

Working conditions for long day care staff varies from Pre-schools and Schools. Teachers in LDC work a longer week and have less holidays. Remuneration for teachers in schools is also higher. Our internal figures show annual turnover ranges from 22%-28%.

Family day care also needs to be included in the definitions. These roles find attending training difficult as they are running their own businesses and they cannot be replaced to attend courses.

- What characteristics describe the child health and family support workforces – in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction? (page-8)

Often staff for these positions are in short supply. Short term funding impacts job security for these workers. There is also possible competition for government positions especially for family support workers with State government departments, such as ADHC and Community Services in NSW, paying considerably higher wages.

Connections with the community is an important element in the success of these roles, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities.

- What data collections provide information on the ECD sector and its workforce? How might these data collections be improved? (page-8)
 - *National Census*
 - *University Research*
 - *Government surveys*
 - *Monitoring visits and licensing information collected by regulatory bodies e.g. in NSW Community Services.*
 - *Registration of Authorised Supervisors collated by regulatory bodies.*
- How do the differing roles and policies of governments affect the planning and provision of the ECD workforce? (page 10)

Services have been slow to realise the implications of the recent government policy to implement 1:4 ratio across the ECD sector; while NSW is in a better position than other states this may change if NSW workers are enticed away to other states/territories.

Despite the latest attempts to streamline some policies and processes (eg, the National Quality Framework), there are still many examples of duplication and/or conflicting national and state programs and requirements, eg, some overlap between family support programs funded at national and state levels with different reporting requirements

Implementation of legislation and policy decisions which guide funding, qualifications, number of staff and conditions, support for training and who can access this i.e. often difficult to access for regional services

- 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 requirement for early childhood university qualified teachers within the NSW regulation even when noting the changes imbedded in the new National legislation and the new Quality Standards.

Under the NSW Keep Them Safe Initiative, family referral services have been established which link families with other professionals.

- What factors affect the demand for, and the skills required of, the child health workforce? (page-14)

A focus on mental health and children's wellbeing will require a mental health workforce that is qualified in understanding the needs development needs of young children.

- What factors affect the demand for, and the skills required of, the family support workforce?

This workforce will need training in child development.

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

If it is government policy that, for example, all children should access at least 15 hrs per week of formal early education in their year before primary school, then could the government provide some kind of subsidy to parents or service providers for this? Potentially the current child care rebate could be restructured, so that a greater rate is paid to centres for children who enrol for up to 15 hrs and a lower but reasonable rate for additional hours (to maintain affordable fees overall)

- 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)

If the cost of housing in Australian cities continues to rise, the need for women to work will continue; this could maintain a certain level of 'demand'. However, since most of Australia's population resides in major cities, there is doubt that any small increase in Australia's fertility rates will be sustained; children cost money, and with mortgage/rent demands forever on the rise, economics will continue to push towards smaller families

In addition, despite paid parental leave, care for babies and very young children is very limited in formal care settings; while paid parental leave might encourage and help women in the first months after birth, where do the babies go after that? Some families draw on support from family members (but many don't have ready access to these), or private nanny arrangements (if they can

afford it), or family care (a model of care that has not been as extensively evaluated as long day care but should be), or they exit the workforce.

- 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)

Providing a range of benefits and conditions that support this workforce does have an impact on the retention of staff, for e.g. providing opportunities for continued learning and development, flexible work practices and a supportive collaborative culture.

SDN provides a number of employee benefits to attract ECD workers to the organisation. SDN provides many opportunities for on-going professional development and access to many formal and informal reflective / network groups. Staff have opportunity to participate in research and influence everyday ECE practice.

It can be difficult to find staff with the skill to include children with a disability into mainstream services. Attitudes do have a major impact on this.

In some locations it can be difficult, particularly in Canberra when competing with government roles.

- 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)

Early childhood teachers can attain higher wages, longer holidays, less face to face hours in the lower primary school setting.

Attracting teachers/graduates to the sector needs to occur through connections with university and at the prac placement stage where students can see the benefits of working in the sector.

Whilst SDN offers employees working face to face with children – non teaching time for planning and development, this is still a constant challenge to achieve for all staff. Current legislative frameworks often limit capacity to be flexible with staffing arrangements and ability to offer these types of conditions to staff.

- 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)

Positive retention strategies are providing continued learning and development opportunities and career progression. Larger organisations like SDN have the ability to implement such strategies where stand-alone services would struggle.

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

SDN's recent internal employee survey showed that the main reason people join our organisation is to support children realising their potential, which is aligned with the organisations mission. Staff are usually values driven and have a genuine interest in the way children learn and develop in the early years. Other main reasons for joining were due to SDN's reputation in the sector and the opportunity for continued learning and development.

- 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)

The workforce in predominantly female and the term "care" undervalues the skill level required for work in this sector. The Importance of those working with children in the early years is undervalued in Australia, a comparison with wages and conditions of other OECD countries would be interesting.

Much of the cost has been assigned to parents and so families cannot afford to pay any more. Parents and families are not required to pay for a teacher in a school so why should the government not pay for teachers in early childhood education and care settings. Affordability is a key factor affecting the EC sector.

- 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 dual system in NSW has resulted in a burdensome system at times. We are hopeful that a new system will reduce red tape and duplication of work. Education and information for ECD workers regarding the new framework will be vital in reducing stress and workload.

- How appropriate are the qualifications required for entry into various ECD occupations? Do differences in qualifications requirements restrict workers' ability to move between jurisdictions or ECD sectors? (page 18)

Some concern has been expressed about the Birth to 12 qualification for two reasons:-this requires a large range of skills and knowledge and graduates are likely to move away from the Early Childhood Sector in their search for better pay and conditions

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

This is dependent upon the University course or the Registered Training Organisation's course delivery. Some graduates are very much work ready – others not so and this is often due to the amount of practicum/work placement they have undertaken in their course. Recent graduates do not always have the skill of including children with a disability.

As stated previously the social work degree restricts workers as they may not have been exposed to child development.

SDN provides thorough induction process on commencement of any new staff. This ensures staff are aware of all responsibilities and legislative requirements.

SDN offers a new graduate reflection group to all newly qualified ECTs. This provides a network and support for this staff group to come together to share experiences and grow.

- 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? (page 19)

Despite that Early Childhood development being high on the government agenda there are not a lot of incentives for people to undertake studies to qualify. TAFE NSW has exempted fees for Diplomas in Children's Services, however university students still have to pay fees. If graduates are prepared to work in certain regional and remote areas they may be eligible for a refund of part of these fees.

There is a high literacy level required in undertaking qualifications in ECD and sometimes support is not accessible for students from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds.

SDN has had success with our FaHCSIA funded Tracks in Learning program which delivers training and employment support to Aboriginal women in inner city Sydney.

- 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)

Professional development is often funded by the service. SDN invests a great deal of funding to ensure staff have an array of equitable opportunities to participate in learning and development.

SDN strives to provide staff with career opportunity through supporting staff to gain higher qualifications or sideways or promotional career opportunities.

- Are in-service training and professional development programs meeting workforce development needs? Are there barriers to ECD staff accessing training and development programs? If so, how could such barriers be overcome?(page 19)

An issue for staff working directly with children is that they are face to face for most of the working day. Therefore most professional development must occur after the normal working hours. SDN remunerates for any professional commitment after hours however this does impact on ECD workers' personal lives and family.

At present should staff be able to attend professional development in work time there is still significant cost in hiring replacement staff.

- Do you consider professional status to be an issue for the ECD workforce? What factors

determine professional status in the sector? (page 20)

Yes, due to society's image of the child and the image of those who work with them.

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

- *Pay parity for Early Childhood Teachers with Primary & Secondary school teachers*
- *Improved conditions of employment*
- *Media debate – 'the image of the child in a productivity growth focussed environment.'*

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

- *It is not a matter of just building an ECD workforce, the issue is ECD workforce retention. If incentives are not introduced there will be difficulty in meeting COAG's objectives.*
- *Federal government needs to fund for additional training with some incentives provided for ECD employers to undertake a personal commitment to professional development.*

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

There needs to be a commitment to extensive work placement throughout the duration of courses.

A balance of subjects/competencies needs to be constantly reviewed and integrated into all courses. Electives could allow students to specialise on particular areas e.g. management and administration; additional needs; social inclusion.

- What is the scope for productivity improvements in the ECD sector?(page 21)

SDN has been working with higher child to staff ratios for some years in particular for 0-2 years, which we feel has attributed to staff satisfaction in this area.

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

Planning is key to support staff that will be required to upgrade qualifications. SDN has commenced planning in this area and frameworks developed to support staff such as incentives and time off to study.

- What are the implications for the ECD workforce, in terms of skill-mix requirements and work practices, from integrating or co-locating ECD services?

As experienced by other sectors (e.g., health) integrating or co-locating services requires a different way of thinking and operating, from the top in terms of creating an organisational culture that supports a different model, through to the ground in terms of how day-to-day business gets done; some may need training in how to introduce and sustain these changes

- Is there scope for the development of generalised ECD workforce or a pool of specialised integrated services managers? (page 22)

The concept of specialised integrated services managers is attractive.

Any planning regarding this type of pool would need to ensure the workforce is not casualised.

- In the context of increasing integration of ECD services, does the involvement of multiple unions and professional associations affect the capacity for innovation and flexibility in the ECD workforce?(page 22)

With multiple unions representing the workforce, to achieve innovation, flexibility and support for an integrated approach unions and employers will need to have greater collaboration and harmonisation.

- How will the ageing of the population, the introduction of paid parental leave, and other demographic, social and policy changes affect the supply of ECD workers? (page 22)

With the ageing population and the high cost of nursing homes, more people currently in ‘caring’ professions may move to working in aged care services and could limit further the ability to attract workers to the ECD sector.

There may be an increase in demand once children turn 1 year – as families may have been able to afford to stay home – similar to Scandinavian countries.

- What skills must ECD workers have in order to provide effective services to Indigenous children? Do all ECD workers who work with Indigenous children have these skills? Given the challenges faced by many services for Indigenous children, how appropriate are the remuneration and conditions for workers in those services? (page 23)

ECD workers should have a very strong understanding of Indigenous culture, and demonstrable relationships with Indigenous families. Presently a large number of current workers don’t have these skills.

More indigenous workers in the ECD sector could help; this would help Indigenous children and families, and those involved in caring and educating them.

- 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)

SDN has had success with our FaHCSIA funded Tracks in Learning program which delivers training and employment support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in inner city Sydney.

SDN has recently also established an Aboriginal Unit which aims to manage SDN's Aboriginal programs and work with staff to facilitate cultural awareness, increase Aboriginal employment and access in our services and strengthen relationships with Aboriginal children, families and communities.

- 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? (page 24)

Currently in NSW services can access support from the IPSU, Early Intervention, Community Health and organisations such as SNAIC, IPSP, ISA & ECICP.

Given the complexity and skill required to be effective and skilled to work with all children it is imperative that staff have access to on-going professional development.

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

This question depends on where responsibility lies in relation to working with the child and the type of role. In NSW funding support initiatives are intended to raise the ratio to ensure permanent staff can work with children with an additional need.

ISS funding for an additional worker is a contribution to extra ratios that are often required when working with children with additional needs.

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

SDN has a strong commitment to employing staff from CALD background and ensure communication and professional development support the use of staff home language.

- 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)

Scandinavian countries follow the social pedagogy tradition and as such have a different view of children from Australia. The focus is that communities are made safe for children. Opportunities are provided for children's development of life long skills including resilience, persistence. (OECD) 2006 Starting Strong p-2

In France Early Childhood Teachers are paid more than their secondary school counterparts in recognition of the vital importance of the early years in terms of learning and development.

Pedagogical leadership is valued in the schools of Reggio Emilia and as such there are more visible career pathways.