

Submission to the Productivity Commission Early Childhood Development Workforce Study

JUSTINE MCNAMARA AND REBECCA CASSELLS

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MODELLING (NATSEM), UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

As child care researchers, we would like to take the opportunity to briefly respond to the Commission's call for submissions into the Early Childhood Development Workforce Study. Our particular focus in this submission is on the school age care workforce. Please note that the views included in this submission are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by NATSEM, and are not intended to represent the views of any of the organisations which have funded our research.

Research into many aspects of out of school hours care (OSHC) in Australia is very sparse (see Cassells and McNamara 2006; Craig and Sawrikar 2009; Margetts 2006; Newspoll 2008; Qu 2003), and research related specifically to staffing issues in child care tends to focus on early childhood rather than school age settings. OSHC staffing arrangements and the structure of OSHC services, however, differ very substantially from those related to early childhood care, just as the needs of school age children are different from those of pre-school children.

We are pleased to see that the Productivity Commission is including outside school hours care within the scope of its enquiry.

We recently published a report on the staffing profile of Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services (McNamara and Cassells 2010) and have included this report with our submission. However, there are several points we would like to make specifically in relation to the material set out in the Commission's Early Childhood Development Workforce Issues Paper (Productivity Commission 2010):

1. *Scope of the study*

We note that the Commission is including in the scope of its study all formal childcare services, defined as 'childcare services that require government licensing, registration, accreditation or control' (Productivity Commission 2010, p.3). While this is a common definition, it is very likely that there are many services providing *more* than informal care to school age children but which may nevertheless not fall within this definition of formal care. Such services may include after-school sporting activities and many vacation care programs run by community organisations but not registered for Commonwealth Child Care Benefit – perhaps these will be included in the scope of the study, but this is not clear

from the issues paper. While we have not conducted research into this topic, we suspect that data on such services and their staffing may be difficult to assemble, and not all services may strictly meet a definition of 'care', but the participation of school age children in such activities is likely to influence their use of other types of care, and there are likely to be overlaps and similarities in terms of staffing issues.

In terms of the question posed on p. 5 of the issues paper: 'Given the terms of reference, is the suggested scope of the ECD workforce appropriate for the purposes of this study', we suggest that the Commission (if it has not already done so) considers the implications of types of activities participated in by school age children after school and during vacations which may not currently be part of the focus of the study. For example, on p. 6 of the issues paper the Commission notes that the size of the child care workforce is underestimated because it only includes workers employed in approved services, and provides occasional care as an example of a sector in which many services do not receive Child Care Benefit. The Commission may want to consider whether outside school hours care (especially vacation care) is another example of such underestimation.

2. *Characteristics of the child care workforce*

In regard to the series of questions posed at the end of p.7 of the issues paper regarding the characteristics of the childcare and preschool workforces, we would like to draw the attention of the Commission to the fact that OSHC workforce characteristics may differ substantially from those of the early childhood sector. While a formal comparison of the OSHC workforce with the remainder of the childcare sector was beyond the scope of our recent work, some clear differences did emerge: for example, in comparison with workers in long day care, OSHC workers are much more likely to work part-time (unsurprising given the structure of the sector) and slightly lower proportions of the OSHC workforce have formal qualifications than is the case for long day care workers. Our report found high rates of staff turnover (combined with a substantial minority of more stable workers) among OSHC workers, and noteworthy differences between male and female workers, and across states and territories (McNamara and Cassells 2010).

3. *OSHC workforce data*

While the DEEWR (formally FaHCSIA) Child Care Censuses are a rich source of data on outside school hours care staff working in approved settings, changes to questions across census years, and the more recent move to survey rather than census methodology, make tracking trends in OSHC workforce characteristics challenging. Also, as noted above, such data does not include non-Commonwealth funded services.

4. *Supply of ECD workers*

In light of the unique structure and staffing profile of the OSHC sector, the questions regarding supply of ECD workers (including retention and turnover, pay and conditions and appropriate qualifications) posed on pages 15 – 20 of the issues paper would all need to be considered separately for the OSHC workforce.

5. Lessons from other sectors

Given the high rate of part-time work in the OSHC sector, the Commission may find it useful to consider whether sectors outside the early childhood care industry with similar part-time profiles may provide some useful background information to the study in relation to issues such as worker supply, training and retention.

References

- Cassells, R and McNamara, J (2006) Before and after school care: costs and usage of formal child care services for school age children, 1999 and 2002. Paper prepared for the International Women and Leadership Conference: Changes, Challenges & Choices, Fremantle, 16 -17 November 2006
- Craig, L and Sawrikar, P (2009) Work and family: how does the (gender) balance change as children grow? *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16(6), 684-709.
- McNamara, J and Cassells, R (2010) Who cares for school age kids? Staffing trends in outside school hours care. NATSEM report prepared for Community Child Care (Victoria), Network of Community Activities (NSW), economic Security4Women Incorporated
- Margetts, K (2006) The use and influence of outside-school-hours-care in the first year of school. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood*, 13(2), 163-175.
- Newspoll (2008) Out of school hours care study <http://nfaw.org/assets/Socialpolicy/080807-Out-of-School-Hours-Care-Study-2.pdf>
- Productivity Commission (2010) Early Childhood Development Workforce: Productivity Commission Issues Paper. Australian Government, November 2010.
- Qu, L (2003) Minding the children during school holidays. *Family Matters*, No 65, 18-21.