



## **Early Childhood Development Workforce**

**Submission in response to the Productivity  
Commission Issues Paper, November 2010**

**Gowrie Victoria  
January 2011**

## **1. Gowrie Victoria – Who we are**

Gowrie Victoria is an early childhood organisation that has been in operation for 70 years. We operate from two sites in Melbourne, Carlton North and Docklands. Our services reflect the breadth of community involvement in early childhood and our commitment to enrich children's potential directly through the:

- delivery of long day care and kindergarten places; one 76 place centre and one 150 place centre
- provision of resources, information and training sessions, professional learning and nationally recognised training
- demonstration facilities; observation programs where students, educators and a range of visitors observe how we deliver long day care and kindergarten programs; design tours where planners, architects and designers can view and discuss the design needs of an operational early childhood centre
- provision of advice and information spanning a breadth of issues relevant to the early childhood sector from pedagogical leadership to policy development and centre management.

The views expressed in this submission are informed by sector reports, knowledge gained from being a service provider and from student and sector/service feedback, we provide coaching/mentoring services for 240 services across the state and we work with over 3000 educators and 260 students involved in our Nationally Accredited Training programs statewide.

## **2. Key points in the submission**

- 2.1. The quality and consistency of training for early childhood educators needs to be addressed nationally in relation to:
  - 2.1.1. the link between training competencies and the National Quality Agenda and quality standards
  - 2.1.2. the importance of on-the-job experience in a range of settings of prescribed hours
  - 2.1.3. assessing RTO quality against the quality of graduates rather than the current emphasis on administrative processes
  - 2.1.4. the quality of training reflects the skills and knowledge of the trainer/assessor
- 2.2. Consistency of conditions between service types and parity with the school based education workforce is an ongoing requirement to attract and retain early childhood educators.
- 2.3. Strategies to address the retention of the current workforce whilst seeking to expand overall numbers need to be developed. These could include:
  - 2.3.1. funding degree (not early childhood) qualified staff currently working in the sector to complete an early childhood qualification
  - 2.3.2. establishing a central award structure to address portability of conditions
- 2.4. Management, leadership and governance skills need to be enhanced across the workforce to reflect the increase in service hubs, the requirements of the National Quality Agenda and identified difficulties is achieving accreditation. This could be achieved through a range of strategies including the establishment of an Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Management and Leadership.

## **3. Current and future demand for the workforce, with particular regard to the skills required to meet society's needs**

- 3.1. A number of state governments are integrating services to aim for greater client and family responsiveness in the early childhood sector. This is

particularly visible in the push by federal and state governments to establish early childhood 'hubs'. A hub brings together services that the community may need in one area e.g. long day care; kindergarten; maternal and child health; allied health services; toy library etc. The aim is to bridge the gap between services and provide a more cohesive family centred early childhood sector. Management and leadership of these services require a particular skill set that is not currently included in the training packages.

- 3.2. A VET sector, more focused on workforce development at local levels, has the potential to improve service delivery and employment outcomes and quicken the impact/implementation of other reforms. The CHC08 Community Services Training Package includes numerous examples of competency standards which embed broad based skills and knowledge. A revised training package that recognises these and supports students undertaking on-the-job experiences in a range of settings will support and enhance the change for service integration.
- 3.3. Families/society are now more informed and have a stronger awareness of the importance of the early years in terms of development and learning outcomes in the long term, and this has led to families having higher expectations of quality in early childhood services. As quality service delivery is dependant on both staff qualifications and staffing levels the demand for qualified staff holding Diploma and Bachelor level qualifications should and will increase.
- 3.4. Research also clearly shows that the effective management and leadership of an early childhood service is a critical factor in the delivery of high quality services. To meet future demand for skilled managers and leaders it will be important to look at current training programs and the requirements of the sector to ensure the required skill and knowledge development takes place in this area – for both individual and integrated service models.

#### **4. Current and future supply of the workforce, in terms of numbers, knowledge and skills**

- 4.1. There has been an early childhood sector labour market shortage for some time. The National Quality Agenda will require a higher number of qualified staff i.e. an increase in the number of workers in the sector, at the same time a percentage of the current workforce who do not hold early childhood qualifications will be leaving rather than undertaking training.

Targeting funding for VET students at years 11/12 to undertake and Certificate III in Children's Services will assist in increasing the size and qualifications of the workforce over the next few years.

- 4.2. The considerable compliance requirements for Registered Training Organisations (RTO's), have an impact on the effectiveness and consistency in training delivery as resources are committed to management systems and administrative compliance adherence. The current model of quality assessment focuses on processes not outcomes. This has an impact on the amount of resources committed to working with students and placement agencies in the on-the-job component of the training program and places a stronger emphasis on trainer's skills in administrative tasks rather than sector knowledge and practice skills.
- 4.3. Effective VET programs consist of three components: Off-the-job training and assessment; On-the-job training and assessment; and On-the-job experience. On-the-job experience is the best place to learn and practice skills and services actively seek employees with this experience. Over the past few years we have seen students' moving between RTO's in order to

obtain this experience and new graduates reporting that the lack of on-the-job experience is a factor in successful employment. On the job experience and training requirements are open to interpretation and some RTO's provide a minimum number of hours in this area. A greater emphasis on on-the-job experience needs to be encouraged through compliance and training packages. This includes a more explicit definition of on-the-job experience and requirements.

- 4.4. More effective regulation of RTO's is needed to support growth and quality of training in the community services arena. This could include on the job assessments being undertaken by external assessors. The requirement to increase the supply of the early childhood workforce to meet the demand driven by the National Quality Agenda and universal access needs to reflect the quality required through the Agenda. In order to do this the level of training needs to be enhanced to place the emphasis on outcome measures for graduates. Ensuring that training competencies are linked with National Quality Agenda requirements for accreditation and the national framework is a key step.
- 4.5. RTO's currently employ trainers' assessors within a range of employment conditions. In most cases the minimum requirement to become a trainer/assessor is a Children's' Services qualification plus the Certificate IV in training and assessment. There is no requirement for industry experience or for a spread of experience or knowledge across different service type's e.g. long day care, family day, kindergarten. These factors do not support the delivery of effective training as they limit the trainer's ability to support students with practical examples and their ability to translate competency requirements to actual practice. Lack of practical experience and knowledge also affects an assessor's skill in observation.
- 4.6. The current training package requires a student to have experience in a *range of circumstances*. Given the breadth of service types a graduate will end up working in there is value to modifying the package to include experience in a *range of early childhood settings* rather than the more open circumstances.

## **5. Workforce composition that most effectively and efficiently delivers desired outcomes**

- 5.1. The newly adopted workforce qualification requirements provide for a staffing ratio in Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) programs for 1:30 with the required qualifications in Early Childhood. We are currently working with a number of OSHC programs where the staff hold a degree in areas such as music, drama and art and are therefore ineligible for funding support to undertake early childhood training. These staff are reporting that they will be leaving the programs. This will result in skilled staff moving out of an already pressured workforce. Consideration needs to be given to supporting those holding a qualification in a related area to undertake early childhood studies that will assist in their retention to the Early Childhood workforce.
- 5.2. The workforce composition that will effectively and efficiently deliver the best outcomes for children, families and practitioners will need to involve many factors. Ideally the workforce will contain practitioners that are a mix of ages, genders and cultures.
- 5.3. The workforce needs to include practitioners with skills and knowledge in management and leadership. Training to up-skill the existing workforce, as well as those coming into the sector on management and leadership is vital. Centres we are currently working with through the statewide Mentoring and Coaching program have identified this as a major issue in their services and

our work with supporting centres through the QIAS process has also highlighted this factor as an issue.

## **6. Appropriate directions and tools for workforce planning and development.**

6.1. One of the key standards under the National Quality Standards, currently in trial stage ready for implementation 2012, is 'Leadership and service management'. Agencies participating in the trial of the standards have expressed difficulty in meeting the requirements related to this standard.

The current quality assessment body, National Childcare Accreditation Council, (NCAC), trend analysis report for the period 1/1/2010 to 30/6/2010 list the following:

"..... 10% or more of services which received an Accreditation Decision during this period have not met the Satisfactory standard for Principles which relate to:

- Staff document children's learning
- Staff ensure children's safety
- Building and equipment safety
- Staff implement food safety and hygiene practices
- Staff support children's need for sleep and comfort
- Infection control and record keeping of immunisation

Factors which may have contributed to these centres not meeting the Satisfactory standard for these Principles include:

- High staffing turnover in the early childhood sector, leading to gaps in record keeping and insufficient documenting of children's learning
- Insufficient dating and sourcing of policies, which has historically been problematic for many child care services
- Changes to state legislation, where services were required to date and review existing policies. " Referenced from the web 20/1/2011, [http://www.ncac.gov.au/reports\\_statistics/qualityTrends.asp](http://www.ncac.gov.au/reports_statistics/qualityTrends.asp)

The issues being reported under services trialling the new NQS and the NCAC trend report items quoted above are primarily issues that would be grouped under the broad heading of service management and leadership. This includes governance issues ranging from working with a Board of Directors to managing conflicting expectations from various funding sources.

Current training packages at a Certificate III and Diploma level (Children's Services) have a small number of non compulsory units related to leadership and service management. The Advanced Diploma units have a greater breadth of coverage in this area however the units remain electives, and it is up to the RTO to decide on their inclusion in the training offered.

There appears to be a gap in training programs in this area which could be addressed through the establishment of an Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood, Service Management and Leadership.

A specific training package that covers management and leadership requirements for integrated services should also be considered. In the UK managers of their early childhood hubs are now required to complete studies in this area.

Whilst there is a range of trend data, including the NCAC report above, indicating that service management and leadership is a prime area of need in early childhood services, skills and qualifications in this area are not an automatic

requirement for service directors or managers. A centralised award structure and career pathway structure for the sector would go some way to addressing this current need.

Trend analysis data from areas such as NCAC, the new quality body, Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and current research data should be used as a baseline for the development and review of training package competencies.

6.2 Planning for the workforce needs to incorporate a range of strategies that recognises the importance of the work being undertaken by early childhood practitioners. To ensure the workforce not only attracts people to it, but also retains them, all the issues of low salaries and conditions, lack of career pathways, access to ongoing professional learning and the professional status of the sector have to be addressed.

Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD 2006 report states that "according to expert evidence indicating what should be spent per child in a quality programme, OECD countries – with the exception of the Nordic countries – are under-spending on ECEC services" . (Referenced from the web January 2011, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/38/2/37417240.pdf>).

The National Quality Agenda aims to raise the quality of early childhood education across the nation, and is strongly supported in the sector. Workforce planning therefore should address not only the quality of educators but also the source and modality of funding to support establishing and maintaining a quality workforce. This should include staff child ratios, initial training costs, ongoing professional learning and development and employment conditions.

## **7. Factors of notable significance for that particular workforce.**

7.1. The number of publicly funded training positions for community services (CHC) Training Packages, inclusive of early childhood; (see *Table 1*) has grown significantly in the last 10 years. Continued growth in this area is anticipated.

Table 1 - Publicly funded RTO enrolments in CHC02/99 Community Services Training Package (inclusive of Early Childhood)

|          | 2002   | 2003   | 2004   | 2005   | 2006    | 2007    | 2008    |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| CHC02/99 | 78,905 | 84,435 | 90,965 | 99,275 | 107,310 | 113,530 | 124,733 |

**Source:** *National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), 'Course enrolments in Community Services and Health Training Packages 2008', req. no. 22862. NCVER, Adelaide.*

7.2. In 2009 the federal government announced significant changes to the Early Childhood sector under the broad heading of 'The National Quality Agenda' (NQA). The NQA has three parts:

- A National Quality Standard – information about the quality of early childhood education and early school years care services that can assist parents understand the quality of education and care they can expect their children to receive
- A National Quality Rating System – a quality rating for seven key areas of childhood development and learning

- An Early Years Learning Framework – a documented framework informing the foundation of quality teaching and learning for all early childhood education and care settings.

The NQA is changing the skills and knowledge base required in early childhood settings and in kindergartens it is introducing an accreditation system for the first time. In addition the staff ratios and qualification requirements are changing. This will increase the demand on an already limited workforce and requires existing staff to undertake study to remain employed.

## **8. Current sectoral and jurisdictional boundaries limit innovation and flexibility in workforce planning, development and practices**

- 8.1. Employment conditions vary within services, between service types within the early childhood sector and between early year's teachers in the school system and early childhood services. These impact on the perception and value of the work in a number of ways:
- Potential students have chosen not to proceed with an early childhood course because they receive a higher level of pay from working in retail.
  - VET and employment services students report that they have been steered towards early childhood courses because they are the 'last resort' option
  - Large sections of the community still struggle to view working in early childhood work as a skilled role. Common language still classifies early childhood work as childminding rather than education and care.
  - Salary is linked to the level of qualifications in relation to Certificate III, Diploma and Bachelor, and there is generally no recognition for completion of the Advanced Diploma. This is often cited by educators as a reason why they do not undertake this course.
  - Long service leave for teachers working in kindergartens is portable between services, however, for teachers and educators working in long day care or other service types long service leave is not necessarily portable. Staff report that they are staying in centres/positions just to maintain the long service leave.
  - Salary and conditions in relation to planning time is generally based on the individual's qualifications and is not necessarily reflective of the position the individual is in. This can translate to staff with a low administrative requirement receiving more planning time than those with complex administrative responsibilities and centre managers earning less than room leaders.
  - Employment conditions also vary within service types .e.g. long day, depending on the employing body and the fee structure of the service. This has an impact on attraction and retention of staff and career pathways.
- 8.2. Marrying the provision of funded programs to workforce requirements is an area that needs to be addressed. An example is the provision of the Inclusion Support Program to assist children with additional needs access education and care services. The level of funding is for a predetermined number of hours, (5), it doesn't relate to the need for a full day in the service, or a full days employment. In addition the hourly subsidised rate is lower than actual salary costs. Programs such as this have a high administrative component related to the attraction and retention of the funding. For the workforce this means employing staff at a lower rate of pay or providing less hours of employment, finding time to complete administrative tasks and learning the skills required to complete and report on funding agreements. This program is also linked to allied health programs e.g. a child has a

developmental delayed assessed by psychologists who provides their report to the family and the early childhood service. The service then needs to apply for the funding. Each service has different timing, different reporting requirements and there is a requirement for coordination between each program, centre staff and the family. Funding levels do not reflect the time required to address this and the training programs core competencies do not necessarily provide staff with the skills required to make the process work effectively.

**8.3.** This complexity of relationship management, managing multiple funding sources and coordination requires specific skills in management, leadership and governance. As multi dimensional Early Childhood Service Hubs are established in line with the government direction these skills will be in greater demand. There is also the issue of the difficulties around governance of these services as several services co locate and all of them have different governance structures.

**8.4.** Integrating and co-locating services provides access to specialist workers which in turn support the early childhood professional, child/ family in a collaborative approach to support the child/family with additional needs. This model also assists to build the status of the early childhood professional in relation to how they are viewed by the wider community. This model also helps to provide the child increased inclusion in an early childhood setting

## **9. Additional Comments**

In 1999 the Abbott Preschool Program was established in New Jersey USA. The program provides publicly funded early education services, combining private child care centres, Head Start centres, and public schools. The program aimed to place preschool teachers on an equal footing with K-12 teachers in terms of pay and qualifications.

In 2007 the Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California at Berkeley interviewed 98 private child care and Head Start directors who participated in the program to identify the accomplishments, challenges and suggestions for improvement. The report, released in 2007 identified the following 6 'lessons':

- a. Collaborate: partnerships are essential among the state agencies that administer preschool, child care and Head Start; between state agencies and local school districts; and between school districts and private child care and Head Start centres.
- b. Develop strategies to create a unified early care and education system that incorporates private child care centres, Head Start, and the public preschool program.
- c. Minimize inequities in compensation and training resources among teaching staff within and across preschool centres.
- d. Provide ongoing mentoring and support for centre directors about staff development and equity issues within centres.
- e. Develop a professional development system that is accessible to teaching staff in private child care and Head Start settings, and that leads to a skilled and diverse early childhood teacher workforce.
- f. Promote ongoing leadership development for publicly funded, mixed-delivery preschool services, focusing on school district staff and centre directors."



Referenced from the web January 2011 - Whitebook, Marcy, Eyan, Sharon, Kipnis, Fran and Sakai, Laura. [http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/partnering\\_preschool\\_highlights08.pdf](http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/partnering_preschool_highlights08.pdf)

The full research report and major findings are worthy of consideration in addressing the early childhood workforce reform in Australia.