

Submission to the
Productivity Commission

On the Early Childhood
Development Workforce Study

About UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UCCYPF) is a service group of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. Our concerns for social justice and the needs of disadvantaged children, young people and families inform the way we serve and represent people and communities. UCCYPF is made up of UnitingCare Burnside, UnitingCare Unifam, UnitingCare Disability and UnitingCare Children's Services. Together these organisations form one of the largest providers of services to support children and families in NSW.

This submission draws on the experience of UnitingCare Burnside and UnitingCare Children's Services.

About UnitingCare Burnside

UnitingCare Burnside (Burnside) is a leading child and family organisation in New South Wales, with over 80 programs across metropolitan, regional and rural communities. Our purpose is to provide innovative and quality programs and advocacy to break the cycle of disadvantage that affects vulnerable children, young people and families. We provide services across the continuum, ranging from preventative programs such as supported playgroups; early intervention programs such as Brighter Futures; intensive family support programs; out-of-home care programs and aftercare programs.

About UnitingCare Children's Services

UnitingCare Children's Services provides accessible children's services within a not-for-profit community service environment. It licenses, resources and oversees services operated by management committees of local congregations as well as providing support, guidance and direction to its own directly-provided services. Both locally managed and directly provided services work together to deliver quality early childhood education, care and support to more than 6,000 children in preschools, long day care, occasional care and out of school hours care services in NSW and the ACT.

Currently, we have 11 directly managed services and 41 locally managed services, including:

- Preschools (21)
- Long day care (21)
- Out of School Hours Care (OOSH) (8)
- Occasional care (2).

We would like to thank the UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families staff who participated in consultations and made other contributions as part of the preparation of this submission.

Prepared by Toni Beauchamp, Principal Policy Officer with contributions from Romola Hollywood, Manager Social Policy and Advocacy

Contact Person:

Romola Hollywood, Manager Social Policy and Advocacy

Social Policy and Advocacy team, Social Justice Unit

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families

PO Box W244, Parramatta NSW 2150

Phone 02 9407 3215, Fax: 02 9687 6349 Email: rhollywood@burnside.org.au

1. Executive Summary

UnitingCare Children Young People and Families (UCCYPF) welcomes the Productivity Commission's Study on the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Workforce and the opportunity to comment on the Issues Paper. Our response focuses primarily on workforce issues that impact on the provision of high-quality ECD services to meet the needs of disadvantaged children and families and the implications for the workforce of moving to more integrated service delivery.

The policy frameworks for the funding and delivery of early childhood education and care (ECEC) are complex due to the historical differences between state and commonwealth responsibilities. Early childhood practitioners, academics and policy makers agree that early childhood programs delivered in preschool and long day care settings will deliver similar learning and developmental outcomes for children. However, the two systems are still perceived differently by early childhood staff, parents and the community. It is essential that future policy and planning for the early childhood workforce bridges the differences between the service delivery models.

In relation to demand for ECEC services, cost and affordability is often the key factor impacting on a family's decision about whether to use formal services, particularly for families in low socio-economic areas. Along with cost, availability of services is a key issue, particularly for babies aged 0-2 years.

The main factors impacting on the shortage of qualified ECD staff are low wages and poor working conditions, lack of career pathways and the continuing perception that early childhood workers are not valued by the community. There are also issues relating to lack of parity in pay and conditions across different parts of the sector.

The introduction of the minimum qualification requirement for working in ECEC services is an essential step to improving quality in early childhood services. In response to the increased demand for qualified ECEC workers, it is critical that the integrity of training is not compromised.

Leading international researchers concur that integrated programs which combine child-focused educational activities with explicit attention to parent-child interactions have the greatest impact and that integrated models are best positioned to engage disadvantaged families and communities. There needs to be a greater focus in Australia in ECD qualifications on equipping staff to work in a more integrated way. In particular there needs to be a focus on ensuring that those in management positions are able to lead this process effectively.

2. Scope of the ECD sector

What are the benefits and limitations of integrating and co-locating ECD services?

UCCYPF has a longstanding interest and experience in the provision of integrated and co-located child and family services. UCCYPF has recently been announced as the successful tenderer for establishment of the new integrated Aboriginal Child and Family centre in Blacktown in partnership with Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre and Link-Up NSW. This is one of nine new services being developed by the NSW Department of Human Services, Community Services through funding from the Commonwealth Government.

Leading international researchers concur that integrated programs which combine child-focused educational activities with explicit attention to parent-child interactions have the greatest impact¹ and that integrated models are best positioned to engage disadvantaged families and communities.² For example, the National Evaluation Report of the *Sure Start* program in the UK found that targeted programs are less effective in supporting positive outcomes for children in disadvantaged communities than integrated, universal strategies providing active outreach to families experiencing disadvantage.³

The benefits of an integrated and co-located model lie in the seamless access it provides to a variety of expertise and opportunities in a single convenient location. Delivering a range of services in a universal early childhood education and care (ECEC) venue reduces the potential for stigma because these venues are not associated with a specific type of 'problem'.⁴ Co-location of services provides opportunities for families to become familiar with other staff and makes transition to other programs within the service much easier.

Co-location and co-ordination of services enables children and families to experience a 'one-door, no-wrong door' approach to service delivery. In the current service system, families who have reached a crisis and are desperate for help are often being referred on to other services because they don't meet the criteria at which they arrive. This means they have to tell their story over and over again. Not only can this be frustrating and time consuming for families but it can also add to their stress.

¹ Shonkoff, J. and Phillips, D.A., 2000, *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Academy Press, Washington.

² Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Blatchford, I S., Taggart, B. and Elliot, K., 2003, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period*, Institute of Education, University of London.

³ Anning, A., Stuart, J., Nicholls, M., Goldthorpe, J., and Morley, A., 2007, *Understanding Variations in Effectiveness amongst Sure Start Local Programmes*, SureStart Report 024, www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/impact/documents/40.pdf

⁴ McDonald, M., 2010, *Are disadvantaged families "hard to reach"? Engaging disadvantaged families in child and family services*, Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia. www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps1.html

Integrated child and family centres can also provide a focal point for a local community, to create a positive sense of community and reduce social isolation of disadvantaged families.

What are some other examples of integrated and co-located services?

Brighter Futures

The Brighter Futures program is funded by the NSW Department of Human Services to provide targeted support to meet the needs of vulnerable families and prevent escalation of emerging child protection issues. The program provides an integrated service model that combines case management services with some or all of the following service components: home visiting, parenting programs and quality children's services. Families in the program may also be referred to generalist or specialist community services such as mental health and drug and alcohol services.

The design of the Brighter Futures Program was informed by research evidence on effective programs. In particular, research evidence shows that secondary intervention programs are more likely to have significant outcomes when they use multi-faceted approaches and work with parents and children concurrently.⁵ The most effective approach is to combine a strategy aimed at parents while providing high-quality child care for children.⁶

UnitingCare Burnside (Burnside) is a Lead Agency for Brighter Futures in four regions and is also a contracted service provider for Brighter Futures in Western Sydney. As a Lead Agency, Burnside has developed a specific model of supporting parents to access and sustain placements in quality ECEC services. We have employed Early Childhood Facilitators (ECFs) whose focus is on addressing the needs of children. Our Early Childhood Facilitators work alongside the Brighter Futures caseworkers as part of a multi-disciplinary team. This approach differs from most other Lead Agencies where caseworkers arrange the placement of children in ECEC services.

Eligibility for Brighter Futures is dependent on the identification of risk factors for child protection such as domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol misuse and parental mental health issues. Families in Brighter Futures are often dealing with several of these issues and consequently require a high level of support to access and maintain placements in ECEC services successfully.

The role of our ECFs includes working with parents to help them understand the benefits of ECEC for the child's development and school readiness and to address any misgivings they may have about using child care. ECFs also

⁵ Katz, I., Spooner, C., and Valentine, K., 2006, *What interventions are effective in improving outcomes for children of families with multiple and complex problems?* Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

⁶ Gomby, 2005, cited in NSW Department of Community Services, 2008, *Prevention and Early Intervention Update – trends in recent research, Research to Practice Notes*, www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/researchnotes_pei_trends.pdf

work with parents to address any practical barriers that may prevent enrolment. For example, often children are not up-to-date with immunisations or the parents may not have a birth certificate for the child. Following enrolment, the ECF helps the parents understand what is expected of them and helps parents manage any separation issues with their child in the first few days.

Our ECFs have built strong relationships with ECEC services including council, community and private providers. They work closely with providers to identify appropriate child care placements, ease the process of enrolment and work with the ECEC provider to sustain the placement. This includes ongoing work with the ECEC staff to address any behavioural issues affecting the child's integration into the service. The ECFs also assist the ECEC service in preparing children for the transition to school. This may involve identifying a school setting which will meet the specific needs of the child and facilitating meetings with the family, childcare centre, specialist service and the school.

ECEC services have been provided with ongoing support around reports of risk of harm for children. Caseworkers and ECFs are available to discuss concerns and the service is supported to fulfil their role as a mandatory reporter and to speak with the family about this when appropriate.

Where children are attending long day care centres (approved child care provider for Child Care Benefit), ECFs also work with ECEC services to ensure that the maximum rate and hours of Child Care Benefit are applied, and that other sources of ECEC funding are explored. They have been proactive in educating services on the procedure to follow to secure Special Child Care Benefit and/or increased hours of Child Care Benefit funding.

The Burnside Brighter Futures model of employing ECFs has proved highly successful in helping disadvantaged families to access and maintain ECEC placements. The evaluation of Brighter Futures⁷ states that overall, approximately one third of families in the program received a child care service. Our data shows that our multidisciplinary team approach has been much more successful – for example, in 2010, 79% of Indigenous families in our Dubbo program received child care (35 out of a total 44 Aboriginal families).

3. The early childhood development workforce

*Does this list provide comprehensive coverage of formal child care settings?
Is this an adequate representation of the broad roles and responsibilities of child care and preschool workers?*

In NSW the titles for most roles and responsibilities in ECEC services, such as preschool and long day care services, are very similar. It should be noted that

⁷ Social Policy Research Centre, 2010, *The Evaluation of Brighter Futures, NSW Community Services' Early Intervention Program Final Report*, Report for Community Services, Department of Human Services, NSW.

both community-based preschools and not-for-profit long care day centres are generally operated by a volunteer committee or board with the overall governance responsibilities for the service(s).

The terminology used to describe the positions in NSW ECEC services derived from the NSW award system where there were separate awards for:

- early childhood teachers and directors who have university degree qualifications in early childhood teaching and education
- other primary contact staff with vocational qualifications (such as the Diploma of Community Services Children's Services), unqualified staff and support staff such as cooks and cleaners
- administration staff.

It should be noted that significant change is taking place as the sector moves to the Modern Award system which uses different terminology for the pay and classification scales than the NSW award system.

The key roles in preschool and long day care services can be defined as:

- **Director**
 - Director refers to the manager of the service who holds an early childhood degree qualification such as the three year Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) or the four year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). It should be noted that generally only larger services can afford to create a non-teaching director position. In smaller 1 and 2 unit services, Directors will usually have face-to-face teaching responsibilities (for some of the week) in addition to responsibility for the day-to-day management of the service.
- **Co-ordinator Qualified** (occurs in some small services where a director is not employed)
 - Co-ordinator refers to the manager of the service who holds a vocational qualification such as the Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services). Co-ordinators will generally only be found in smaller 1 unit services where an early childhood teaching degree has not been required to meet the children's services regulations. The co-ordinator role may be less common as the new COAG requirements for degree qualified teachers to deliver preschool programs is implemented.
- **Early Childhood Teacher**
 - Early Childhood Teachers hold a three-year Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) or the four-year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). They are responsible for the development and delivery of the program for a group/room of children. They may also supervise other staff (such as an advanced child care worker qualified or child care worker) who assist them in the delivery of the program.

- **Advanced Child Care Workers Qualified**
 - Advanced Child Care Workers Qualified hold the Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services) and are responsible for the development and delivery of the program for a group/room of children. Like early childhood teachers they may supervise other staff (such as child care workers) who assist in the delivery of the program.
- **Advanced Child Care Workers Unqualified**
 - There are generally few staff employed in this role as both preschools and long day care services tend to seek Diploma Qualifications. It should be noted that the transition is underway to require all Advanced Child Care Workers Unqualified to hold the entry-level Certificate III in Children's Services; however a Certificate III will not deem them to be a qualified worker for the purposes of the children's services regulation.
- **Child Care Worker**
 - Traditionally this position was unqualified, though the transition is underway to require all Child Care Workers to hold the entry-level Certificate III in Children's Services.
- **Other ancillary workers**
 - Administration Officers in preschools and long day care centres generally work part-time and provide support in processing fees, bookkeeping and a range of other administrative duties
 - Cooks are mainly employed in long day care centres – however, some long day care centres don't offer cooked meals
 - Cleaners and gardeners
 - Bus drivers are employed in some services, particularly Aboriginal specific services where transport is a key factor.

What characteristics describe the child care and preschool workforces – in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction?

The table below provides a summary of qualifications of staff in 19 UCCYPF ECEC services⁸. As shown in the table, primary contact staff range from degree qualified directors and teachers, vocationally trained advanced child care workers, child care workers who hold the entry-level Cert III qualification and unqualified child care workers. It is notable that out of the total number of child care worker roles (primary contact staff who assist either early childhood teachers or advanced childcare workers qualified) 64% or nearly two thirds of child care workers do not hold the minimum entry qualification.

⁸ At the time of preparing this submission we have not yet received responses from all services to a survey of staff in our ECEC services.

Qualifications	Role	Head Count	% of Total Workforce
University Degree: Early Childhood Education	Directors and Teachers	63	32%
Vocational Qualification: Diploma of Community Services Children's Services	Co-ordinators and Advanced Child Care Workers Qualified	42	21%
Vocational Qualification: Certificate III in Children's Services	Child Care Workers	34	17%
Primary Contact Staff with none of the above qualifications	Child Care Workers	59 (14 currently studying for cert III, 3 studying for diploma)	30%
Total		198	

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

Until recently the NSW Department of Community Services required all funded services to provide information on the roles, qualifications and number of staff employed in children's services as part of their annual reporting and accountability processes. This document was called the Annual Service Planning and Reporting Document (ASPARD). However, it is unclear whether Community Services has ever aggregated this data across the state.

As the Issues Paper identifies, in Australia development of workforce data systems for family support services have lagged behind those established for the early childhood education and care sector. There are opportunities for Community Services to collect workforce information through their funded services and feed this information up through the COAG process. Similarly, the Australian Government could collect workforce data for the services it funds under the Family Support Program. Standard data collection processes should be developed for use in federal and state workforce data collections to ensure that the data collected is nationally consistent.

4. Institutional arrangements and COAG reforms

How do the differing roles and policies of governments affect the planning and provision of the ECD workforce?

The policy frameworks in Australia for the funding and delivery of early childhood education and care are complex, reflecting the evolution of social policy in this area and the differences between state and commonwealth responsibilities.

The states, which have constitutional responsibility for the delivery of education, have traditionally funded preschools. In the 1970s and 1980s the Commonwealth developed policies to fund and expand child care services as

part of 'labour market' strategies to assist with women with workforce participation. Four key models emerged to be eligible for funding through the Child Care Benefit (and its antecedents) by the Commonwealth as approved child care providers: long day care, family day care, out of school hours care and occasional care. The Commonwealth has also provided funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services such as the MACS services (Multipurpose Aboriginal Children's Services).

In NSW the state government delivers preschools through two policy and funding streams:

- 100 preschools funded and delivered by Department of Education and Training and are largely free as they are part of the public education system
- around 800 community managed preschools funded by the Department of Community Services with daily fees making up the difference between government funding and the cost of the service.

One of the most significant outcomes of the different approaches and responsibilities of the states and the Commonwealth in NSW is different terms and conditions for staff working in each system.

Preschools have generally operated school terms and school hours, whereas long day care services have operated to meet the demands of the working hours of parents (generally operating between 8 to 12 hours per day with annual closures of between 2 and 4 weeks).

Early childhood practitioners, academics and policy makers have argued strongly that early childhood programs delivered in preschool and long day care settings will deliver similar learning and developmental outcomes for children. Research also supports the view that the qualifications of staff and the quality of staff interactions with children have a greater effect on children's learning and development rather than the operational hours and type of service. However, the two systems are still perceived differently by early childhood staff, parents and the community.

It is essential that future policy and planning for the early childhood workforce bridges, rather than emphasises, the differences between the service delivery models. Training and professional development should be inclusive of different service types and models. Qualifications and training should maximise the staff capacity to work in different service types throughout their working life.

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

Integrated and co-located child and family centres

As outlined in Section 2, families in disadvantaged communities benefit most from integrated child and family centres that are co-located because of the seamless access they provide to a range of services in the one location.

There are now many examples of high-quality integrated service models across Australia. However, at the state and territory level, there have been significant differences in the extent to which governments have recognised the benefits of integrated, co-located child and family services, with the greatest investment in these services in South Australia, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Tasmania.⁹

The Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program

The Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) is a nurse-led home visiting program funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, through the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.¹⁰ The ANFPP supports Aboriginal women to improve their own health and the health and development of their baby. ANFPP is currently being implemented in four sites across Australia: Melbourne, Cairns, Alice Springs and Wellington (NSW). The model is based on the Nurse Family Partnership model developed by Professor David Olds in the USA. Professor Olds' model is an evidence-based program. It is designed for first time mothers and provides ongoing nurse home visiting from early in pregnancy through until the child's second birthday. We would encourage the Australian Government to expand the Nurse-Family Partnerships program as a key service delivery strategy in the broader Australian Social Inclusion Agenda to assist children at risk of lifetime disadvantage and enduring social exclusion.

Are there other significant policies governing the ECEC, child health and family support sectors and their workforces that the Commission should be aware of?

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children is particularly relevant to the Commission's current study. The National Framework focuses on preventing abuse through early intervention and better integration of child and family services.¹¹ The strategy emphasises the need to create a universal service platform which provides a non-stigmatised entry point to more intensive support for families with additional needs.

⁹ CSDMAC (Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council) 2009, *A strategic assessment of the children's services industry*, Adelaide.

¹⁰ For further information on the ANFP and the evaluation finds of the Nurse Family Partnership model see, www.anfpp.com.au

¹¹ Protecting Children is Everyone's Business, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf

5. Demand for ECD workers

Demand for early childhood education and care workers (ECEC)

What are some of the child development reasons families choose to use, or not use, different ECEC services? How is this changing over time?

From our experience in working with disadvantaged families, we have identified that apart from issues of affordability, disadvantaged families may be reluctant to send their children to ECEC services for a number of reasons including:

- limited parental educational experiences that make early childhood education unfamiliar and/or intimidating
- a belief that children are better cared for by them or family members
- parents may consider that their child does not need care as they are not working and there is often no family history of attending preschool prior to starting school
- parents fear that they will be judged as a parent by services that are perceived as 'middle class'
- rules and complicated enrolment processes that are alienating for families in crisis and daunting for parents with low levels of literacy find difficult to manage
- centres that are not culturally inclusive or welcoming to families from Indigenous or CALD backgrounds
- anxiety about separation (particularly for 0-2 year olds)
- transport issues.

In relation to the choices that families make about different types of care, research has shown that often parents want a happy and friendly environment, rather than focusing on the educative role of ECEC services for their children.¹²

The evaluation of Brighter Futures found that for disadvantaged families using ECEC service through the program there is a tension between quality and convenience. While Brighter Futures policy prioritises quality in children's services, emphasising the social, emotional and developmental benefits of child care, interviews by the evaluators indicated that parents were more likely to prioritise convenience and accessibility when choosing a centre for their children. *"Many parents who had no private transport, and who struggled with multiple children and chaotic morning routines faced real barriers in accessing quality child care services, many of which existed outside their immediate neighbourhood."*¹³

¹² Presentation of qualitative research report findings on behalf of the Boston Consulting Group for the COAG National Early Childhood Development Strategy, at the Early Years: From Research to Policy Practice Seminar, Can Anyone Hear U? Communicating the early childhood development message, November 2010.

¹³ Social Policy Research Centre, 2010, *The Evaluation of Brighter Futures, NSW Community Services' Early Intervention Program Final Report*, Report for the NSW Department of Human Services, www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/brighter_futures_evaluation4.pdf, p76.

To what extent does the relative cost of ECEC services determine the demand for those services?

Cost and affordability is often the key factor impacting on a family's decision about whether to use formal ECEC services, particularly for families in low socio-economic areas. We have extensive waiting lists for our services located in affluent areas, whereas our services in low socio-economic areas tend not to have waiting lists (except for young babies). This is illustrated by the table below, which includes current waiting list information for three centres, two of which are located in low socio-economic areas, while the third is located in an affluent area in the inner west of Sydney.

Age of children	Centre in Bankstown area	Centre in St Mary's area	Centre in Inner West Sydney
0-2 years	12- 13 children on waiting list	2 children on waiting list	About 3 years
Over 2 years	No waiting list	No waiting list	2 years
3-5 years	No waiting list	No waiting list	1 year

The *2010 Annual Child care and Workforce Participation Survey* conducted by CareforKids¹⁴ found that parents are feeling increased pressure in the affordability of child care and the financial viability of returning to the workforce. Of the 2,112 parents who responded to the survey, 10% had reduced the number of days they use care, whilst 24% had changed child care due to cost. Similarly, 25% of parents said being back at work was not financially viable, compared to 22% the previous year.

The different funding arrangements and affordability subsidies (fee relief) that apply to early childhood education and care services can also affect choice and access to services. For example, preschools funded by the NSW Department of Education are free because they are part of the public education system. While only available in some areas of NSW, where available, DET preschools have a competitive price advantage over other local services such as community-based preschool and long day care.

For example, a community-based preschool is likely to charge fees of between \$30 to \$50 a day. A community-based preschool receives some Community Services funding to subsidise fees for low income families¹⁵ and for children who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. However, fees may still be at least \$15-\$20 a day and represent a significant cost to families on a low income especially if the child/ren are to attend two days a week. Similarly, a long day care service offers the Australian Government's Child Care Benefit to reduce the daily fees for families on low and middle incomes if the family meets work/study tests. It is our experience that even with the Child Care Benefit, low-income families will find the out-of-pocket expenses a significant financial commitment from a limited budget. This means that

¹⁴ www.careforkids.com.au/surveys/march2010/results.asp

¹⁵ Families that are eligible for fee-relief in a community-based preschool must either have a Centrelink Health Care Card and/or be able to demonstrate that their annual income is less than \$44,000. Fee-relief is administered at the local service level.

choices around which service to use are often underpinned by the comparison of costs to families.

Along with cost, availability of services is also a key issue. As illustrated in the table above, generally there are less places for babies available. In particular, smaller private centres have tended not to provide places for 0-2 year olds.

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?

The Issues Paper comments that ‘*The ageing of the population may also affect demand for, and the relative price of ECD services. As more workers retire, there may be more family members available to provide informal care, generally at low or no cost.*’ We do not think that this will have a significant impact – generally retirees may assist with care one or two days a week, not full time. As the Productivity Commission outlines in its paper on *Labour Force Participation of Women Over 45*, the workforce participation rates for mature aged women have increased significantly over the past three decades relative to other demographic groups.¹⁶ For women aged 45 to 54 years, participation rates have increased from 47.1 to 78.0 per cent, for women aged 55 to 59 years from 27.8 per cent to 63.4 per cent and for women aged 60 to 64 years from 12.8 per cent to 41.2 per cent. Labour force engagement of mature aged women is expected to grow further in the next three decades. Also, with the ageing of the population, some retirees will have chronic health conditions and may not be in a position to provide child care, while others may be providing care for their spouse or other aged relatives.

Demand for family support workers

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

The demand for family support staff depends predominantly on the level of government funding available and the short term nature of many funding programs. There have been limited increases in funding for family support programs over the past 20 years, and faced with increased operational costs, many services have been forced to reduce hours of operation (and therefore staff hours) and/or cross-subsidise programs.

Work in the family support sector is also becoming more structured and prescribed by funding bodies rather than approaches being defined at the local level. Consequently, the qualifications and skills required of family support staff are determined by the model that NGOs are contracted to deliver. In NSW, for example, Community Services has recently tendered for NGOs to provide intensive family support and intensive family preservation services. The service model is highly prescribed in relation to referral processes (made by Community Services only), service duration, types of

¹⁶ Gifillan, G and Andrews, L., 2010, *Labour Force Participation of Women Over 45*, Productivity Commission Working Paper, Productivity Commission.

support provided and essential staff qualifications and skills.¹⁷ The guidelines specify that caseworkers must have a degree in social work or psychology.

Future demand for ECD workers

How might the demand for ECEC services be affected by changes to female labour force participation?

In our view, paid parental leave is unlikely to have a significant effect on demand as it covers only a three month period. Most babies start in our long day care centres at 4 to 10 months of age. It is also worth remembering that only a small proportion of young babies in Australia attend long day care services. In 2008, only 9% of children aged less than 12 months were in formal child care.¹⁸

6. Supply of ECD workers

Do providers of ECD services have difficulty finding staff? If so, are these problems more pronounced in some ECD occupations or in some areas of Australia? Why is this the case?

Our experience is that it is very difficult to recruit directors and teachers in all parts of Sydney. For example, we recently advertised for a teacher in Bexley and received no replies.

There are even greater challenges in recruiting qualified staff in low socio-economic areas and in regional and rural areas. Recruitment costs are often higher for services in disadvantaged areas because of the repeated costs of advertising.

The difficulty in recruiting experienced directors means that often teachers will become directors with only a few years work experience since graduation. This can place pressures on new directors as they are still developing their on-the-job skills and experience. Appropriate supports for new directors, particularly those with limited overall work experience, are required to reduce the risks of staff burn-out and poor staff retention.

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?

In our experience, the main factors impacting on the shortage of qualified staff are low wages and poor working conditions, lack of career pathways and the continuing perception that early childhood professionals are not valued by the community.

¹⁷ www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/eipp_models_ifs.pdf

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, *Australian Social Trends*, 4102.0.

To what extent are ECEC, child health and family support services experiencing staff retention issues?

Our experience is that there are difficulties in retaining teachers because many are leaving to go to positions in schools with higher salaries and accreditation and recognition of professional teaching standards through the recently established NSW Institute of Teachers.¹⁹ Many staff with diplomas train to be teachers whilst working in ECEC services, then leave once qualified.

Are there examples of effective staff retention strategies in the ECD sector? How might such strategies be replicated throughout Australia?

Feedback from our staff indicates that providing opportunities for career progression and an environment where staff feel that they are working for an ethical organisation with clear values are important factors which assist staff retention in UCCYPF.

Research investigating the extent and reasons for the shortage of early childhood workers in NSW identifies lack of professional support as one contributory factor.²⁰ UCCYPF has developed a range of strategies to provide support and professional development opportunities for our ECEC staff. These include:

- establishment of two Practice Manager positions, that provide specialist early childhood advice and support to centre based children's services and other early childhood programs in Burnside; lead practice development, and ensure that practice is evidence-informed
- directors and co-ordinators in our children's services meet quarterly for a full day to enable information exchange, training and networking
- currently developing training in small groups of services to encourage networking in local areas
- improving induction
- pairing new Directors and Co-ordinators with a more experienced mentor.

While some of these strategies reflect the capacity that is enabled by our organisational size and structure, more generally, effective strategies which are relevant to all services include:

- family-friendly policies
- well-documented staff support structures and supervision
- provision of learning and development opportunities.

¹⁹ See www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au

²⁰ Warrilow, P. et al, op cit.

Pay and conditions

What are the key factors influencing an individual's decision to work in the ECD sector? Do these vary for different ECD occupations?

Low wages and poor working conditions are key factors impacting on an individual's decisions to commence or continue working in the ECD sector. There are also issues relating to lack of parity in pay and conditions across different parts of the sector. For example, the relatively poor pay and conditions for family support workers in the non government sector compared to the government sector makes it more difficult for NGOs to attract and retain staff. As discussed previously, there are similar issues relating to pay disparities in the ECEC sector.

Lack of job security is a significant issue impacting on staff recruitment and retention. Job security for family support workers is often limited due to the short term nature of many government funding contracts. This is also an issue for workers employed under the NSW *Supporting Children with Additional Needs Program* (funded by the Department of Human Services) and the *Intervention Support Program* (funded by DET) (see further discussion page 25). A recent study by the Social Policy Research Centre found that workers in NGO community services were more likely than other workers in NSW to feel they would lose their job in the next year, and almost a third of workers had looked for a job in the last four weeks (compared to only 14.3 percent of workers in the wider NSW workforce).²¹

Feedback from our staff indicates that positive factors attracting some people to work in the sector include enjoyment of working with children and families and the perception that this work fits well with having a family and is a setting where you can work part time. At the same time, however, the extent of part time work in the sector may act as a disincentive for some workers, especially men.²²

The main motivation for our ECFs who choose to work in our Brighter Futures programs is around how they can make a greater difference to the whole family. The position also provides an interesting role and opportunity for career progression.

²¹ Cortis, N., Hilferty, F., Chan, S., and Tannous, K., 2009, SPRC Report Labour dynamics and the non-government community services workforce in NSW, SPRC Report 10/09, report prepared for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Community Services Social Policy Research Centre, www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/Report10_09_LabourDynamics_and_NGOs.pdf
²² Ibid.

Qualifications and career pathways

Are workers who obtain additional skills and qualifications sufficiently rewarded? Is expertise sufficiently recognised and valued? How would opportunities for career progression within the ECD sector be enhanced?

Recognition in the award system of post graduate qualifications in management, particularly for the Director's role, may provide incentives for staff to undertake further study. At present there is little financial incentive to undertake this study, particularly given the high costs of higher education.

Are in-service training and professional development program meeting workforce development needs?

Are there barriers to ECD staff accessing training and development programs? If so, how could such barriers be overcome?

Given the demanding nature of work in children's services where staff are required to be available to supervise children, there are practical barriers to staff attending professional development. For UCCYPF, the major barriers to ECEC staff accessing training and development programs are the costs of backfilling positions and the difficulty of finding suitable staff to stand in for staff attending training. For services in regional and remote areas, there are additional costs of travel and accommodation.

In a study on promoting children's social and emotional wellbeing in ECEC services, directors identified several key challenges to providing training opportunities, including ensuring continuity of staff and costs, both in training fees and staff time.²³ The study also identified concerns about the extent to which some training is relevant and translates into real outcomes and benefits for centres and the children in their care.²⁴ As the authors suggest, for training to be effective and long lasting, it has to be part of a broader capacity-building strategy that addresses organisational policies, procedures, resources, standards of practice and supervision.

The Australian Government funds the Professional Support Co-ordinators (PSC) in each state and territory to provide professional development, advice or resources to assist child care services to provide quality care (Children's Services Central in NSW). However, the support provided by the PSCs is only available to Australian Government approved child care providers. The NSW Government provides only limited resources to peak organisations to provide professional development to state funded services. This again highlights the issues raised by the dual policy framework in children's services.

²³ Davis, E., Priest, N., Davies, B., Sims, M., Harrison, L., Herrman, H., Water, E., Strazdins, L., Marshall, B., and Cook, K., (2010) 'Promoting children's social and emotional wellbeing in childcare centres within low socioeconomic areas: strategies, facilitators and challenges', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35 (3), 77-86.

²⁴ Waniganayake, M., Cheeseman, S., Gioia, K., Harrison, L., Burgess, C. and Press, F., 2008, *Practice Potentials: Impact of Participation in Professional Development and Support on Quality Outcomes for Children in Childcare Centres*, Access Macquarie Limited.

In relation to gaps in existing training and development programs, a study conducted for the Professional Support Co-ordinator Alliance²⁵ found that there are limited systematic professional development and support strategies that assist directors and managers to develop their own leadership potential. An exception is the Victorian early childhood workforce strategy under which the Batlow Institute of Educational Leadership will provide two new leadership programs for early childhood leaders, one focusing on management of staff and relationships and the other on leading professional practice.²⁶

In the United States and Canada there has been a considerable focus on the development of mentoring and leadership development programs for early childhood workers, particularly in the beginning stages. Supervised mentorship and continuous support during the transition from pre-service teacher preparation to the responsibilities of first year teaching may significantly ease the pressure of this transition and reduce attrition rates of first year teachers.²⁷

Professional status

Do you consider professional status to be an issue for the ECD workforce? What factors determine professional status in the sector? How might a change in status be achieved? What would be the effects of such a change?

A body of research and consultations over the years has shown that professional status is a significant issue for the ECD workforce.²⁸

Our experience is that many people are not aware of the child development and educative role of early childhood services and see it as essentially a child minding service. Strategies to improve community awareness and understanding of the role and value of children's services within the context of the importance of the early years of life could help to promote improved professional standing of workers.

As the *Australian Government Report on the Child Care Workforce Think Tank*²⁹ acknowledged, improving the status and standing of the sector will also be commensurate with the remuneration accorded to ECEC workers. Examples from other industries such as nursing and teaching are indicative of this link between increased wages, associated community perceptions, and improved interest in the profession.

²⁵ Waniganayake et al, op cit.

²⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008, *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce: Working to give Victoria's children the best start in life*, Victoria, www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/ecworkforce.htm

²⁷ McCormick, K. and Brennan, S. (2001) 'Mentoring the New Professional in Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education', *Topics in Early Childhood Education*, 21(3): 131-149.

²⁸ See for example, Warrilow, P., Fisher, K., Cummings, K., Sumision, J., a'Beckett, C. and Tudball, J., 2004, *Early Childhood Teachers and Qualified Staff*, SPRC Report 4/04, University of NSW Research Consortium, for the NSW Department of Community Services, Office of Childcare.

²⁹ www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/early_childhood_news/jan_2004_overview_of_child_care_workforce_think_tank.html

Case study – remuneration of early childhood facilitators in UCCYPF Brighter Futures

When the Burnside Brighter Futures program was established in 2006, in keeping with the agency classifications, case workers were paid at a higher grade than early childhood facilitators. In the past year, the organisation went through a process to re-evaluate job descriptions, selection criteria and gradings of the positions. The organisation has recognised that as ECFs in Brighter Futures are required to have tertiary qualifications and have substantial skills and experience in early childhood services they should be on the same salary grade as case workers. This provides a clear statement that the organisation accords equal value to the specialist expertise of early childhood facilitators.

Future supply of ECD workers

Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector?

In response to the increased demand for qualified ECEC workers, it is critical that the integrity of training is not compromised.

UCCYPF has concerns that the training provided by some Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) does not adequately prepare students to work in the ECEC sector. There are now more RTOs providing Cert III qualifications, and a strong monitoring framework is required to ensure students gain the required skills to deliver quality services to children.

Over time, managers in children's services have provided feedback that they have the sense that some university courses no longer adequately cover important elements of the curriculum such as knowledge about child development theories. Also, of concern is that the time students spend in practicums at ECEC services has been reduced in recent years.

In relation to the skills needed by directors and co-ordinators, the Issues Paper cites Bretherton's view that early childhood diplomas may not equip graduates with the management skills needed to run child care centres. Given the broad and complex duties carried out by Directors and Co-ordinators, we agree that there is a need to better equip them with management skills including human resource management, team leadership and financial management. This issue needs to be addressed not only within undergraduate qualifications but also through postgraduate and professional development courses.

Will the workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the sector?

UCCFYP strongly supports the introduction of the minimum qualification requirement as an essential step to improving quality in early childhood services. However, there are challenges associated with implementation of this strategy. We have some concerns about the potential loss of our more experienced ECEC staff when the minimum qualification requirements take effect in 2014. In particular, staff who are close to retirement age may be reluctant to upgrade and undertake training and may choose to retire early. Similarly, staff with English as a second language or with limited education may struggle with having to undertake study and may opt out of the industry.

One of the difficulties in this area is that the process of obtaining recognition of prior learning is complex and costly. Strategies should be developed to resource the early childhood sector to obtain assessment of prior learning of experienced staff. This would include building greater clarity and awareness about the processes for recognition as well as provision of financial support for associated costs.

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

Is there scope for the development of a generalised ECD workforce or a pool of specialised integrated service managers?

While there is widespread agreement concerning the need to build a more integrated service system for children and families this can be challenging. Common barriers to effective inter-agency and inter-sectoral collaboration include differing organisational models and philosophies of service delivery and differing professional beliefs, knowledge bases and practice.

The Australian Government is investing significant resources in the development of the early years workforce under the National Early Childhood Development Strategy. However the focus is on building the pool of TAFE and university qualified early childhood teachers as opposed to reconsidering of the skill sets required to work in a more integrated way.

Grace et al ³⁰ have suggested some ways forward to develop a professional agenda for working in integrated services which is tailored to the Australian context, and which includes:

- building a shared knowledge base – the fundamental knowledge that professionals working in integrated services need to share, such as child development trajectories and the interactions between a child's development and their environment
- facilitating understanding of professional differences

³⁰ Grace, R., Bowes, J., McMaugh, A. and Gibson, F., 2009, 'Working in integrated child and family services: a case for specialised skills and understanding', *Developing Practice*, 24(13).

- training in essential skills such as appropriate sharing of client information.

It is our experience that these are the key elements to working effectively in an integrated setting.

It is also important to recognise the particular skill sets and qualities required to effectively manage and lead integrated services. Managers of these services need to have strong leadership skills to model and promote new ways of working across disciplines. In particular, they need to have the capacity to build shared understandings and purpose, whilst retaining respect for specialist professional expertise.

In a research report conducted for the Professional Support Co-ordinators Alliance, Press et al acknowledge the concerns of early childhood practitioners that their specialist knowledge and expertise may not be given due recognition or valued appropriately in integrated services. However, they suggest that an emphasis on balance between professional and specific skills has the potential to defuse anxieties about the devaluing and erosion of specialist expertise. *“Finding an appropriate balance must involve respect for differing professional knowledge bases. Similarly, the emphasis on generic professional skills (e.g., communication, securing trust, cross cultural competence, problem solving) highlights a shared professionalism that transcends disciplinary boundaries and provides scope for joint professional learning.”*³¹

In the United Kingdom there are two Masters degree level courses that prepare their students to work as leaders of integrated ECD services.³² The Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base offers a Masters degree in ‘Integrated Provision for Children and Families’ in collaboration with Leicester University. The Darlington Research Centre in North Devon offers Masters-level study in their course ‘Towards a common language for children in need’.

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?

In our experience, different awards and pay scales can lead to tensions over pay inequities within a multi-disciplinary team environment. It is critical that the professional skills and experience of our staff are rewarded fairly.

³¹ Press, F., Sumsion, J. and Wong, S., circa 2010, *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*, A research project for the Professional Support Co-ordinators Alliance (PSCA), Charles Sturt University.

³² Grace, R., Bowes, J., McMaugh, A. and Gibson, F., op cit.

ECD workforce for Indigenous children

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?

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

It is well established that access to high-quality early childhood education programs can enhance children's readiness for school particularly for disadvantaged children. Indeed, a report by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs comments that without preschool learning opportunities, Indigenous students are likely to be behind from their first year of formal schooling.³³ However, data from the 2006 Census indicates that 49.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three and four year olds were not enrolled in preschool education in 2006.³⁴

As the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) suggests, increasing levels of participation in ECEC services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children requires services to be affordable, accessible and culturally appropriate.³⁵ Given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families use both Indigenous specific and non-Indigenous specific children's services, mainstream services need to demonstrate a commitment to developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence and providing culturally appropriate programs for children.

UCCYPF's work with Aboriginal families and communities is guided by our Aboriginal Services Delivery Principles and Implementation Plan. The principles emphasise, for example, Aboriginal community participation in planning, service design and evaluation. Our Indigenous Employment Strategy aims to strengthen recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) staff and increase cultural awareness training for all our staff. UCCYPF currently employ 698 members of staff, of whom 47 (6.7%) are Aboriginal.

We have established an Aboriginal Advisory Group, Jaanimili, for UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families Service Group. This group provides feedback and guidance to the Service Group, and also functions as a support network for Aboriginal staff.

³³ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008, *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage: the challenge for Australia*, www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/general/documents/closing_the_gap/p2.htm

³⁴ Cited in Kronemann, M., 2008, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the national early childhood agenda*, For Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

³⁵ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2009, *Submission on the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Reforms*, www.snaicc.asn.au/uploads/rsfil/00321.pdf

Our Manager Aboriginal Services and Development works across the Service Group and provides assistance to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and management. Her key functions include:

- leadership in development of a UCCYPF culture of understanding of working with Indigenous children, young people and families
- establishing and promoting good working relationships and open dialogue with local Indigenous communities, organisations and networks
- providing career guidance to existing and prospective Indigenous staff to encourage employment and career development
- developing and implementing training to support staff in understanding of working with Indigenous people and communities.

The high levels of participation by Aboriginal families in Burnside's Brighter Futures programs demonstrate that we are successful in engaging and sustaining a trusting relationship with Aboriginal families and communities. Over 50% of families in our Dubbo program and over 30% of families in our Coffs Harbour program are Aboriginal. Our Early Childhood Facilitators work with Aboriginal families to help them overcome any misgivings they may have about using children's services and to help build the relationship between centre staff and the parents and child. Importantly, the Early Childhood Facilitators also work with parents in the home to support what the child is learning in the centre and help parents to understand the importance of learning for the child.

Strategies used by UCCYPF to attract ECD workers from Indigenous communities include recognition of prior learning and practice experience, knowledge of culture and community connections. At the same time, however, it is important that Aboriginal workers are supported to obtain the minimum qualifications for working in ECEC services. Simplifying processes for Recognition of Prior Learning is particularly important for Aboriginal workers, Provision of financial support is also a critical part of this strategy (see previous discussion page 20).

Expanding the availability of traineeships would also be an effective way of supporting Aboriginal people to join the child care workforce. Feedback from Aboriginal managers and staff indicates that many Aboriginal people prefer a more 'hands-on' approach to learning, such as informal learning in the workplace through observation. Traineeships enable students to combine practical experience with structured training. However, without proper monitoring, traineeships may be exploited. Traineeships are most successful when the organisation has thought through how they will support the trainee and have appropriate staffing levels that do not rely on the trainee to meet the minimum staffing requirements. It is also important that the trainee has a clear understanding of what is involved and how the traineeship will support their long term goals.

Macquarie University provides a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Studies) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, which is taught by the Institute for Early Childhood in conjunction with Warawara, the Department for Indigenous Studies.³⁶ The focus of the degree is on integrating Aboriginal perspectives in teaching. The degree is taught on-campus in a 'block structure' with accommodation and additional support to help students complete the degree. This is an excellent initiative and could be replicated to support Aboriginal students in other areas.

In a paper prepared for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Kronemann notes that existing state and territory Indigenous workforce strategies have been developed largely in the school education sector rather than in relation to child care.³⁷ *Wannik*, the 2008 Victorian Education Strategy for Koorie students, for example, commits to increasing the number of internships and scholarships for Koorie teachers; employment of more Indigenous support staff; and the development of a professional learning package to support the induction and professional learning needs of Koorie workers.

ECD workforce for children with additional needs

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?

Children with disabilities and other special needs

ECEC workers need a range of attributes, knowledge and skills to work effectively with and support the inclusion of children with special needs:

- knowledge and understanding of particular types of disability
- behaviour management strategies, particularly for children with autism
- knowledge of specialist support services for children with disabilities and skills in working with other professionals
- strategies for including children with disabilities in mainstream settings such as basic signing and Boardmaker³⁸ visual tool program
- capacity to adapt mainstream programs to provide for children with special needs, so that children with lower skill levels can do the same activity at a different level; and
- perseverance, as progress of children with disabilities can be slow.

It is likely that there is considerable variance across the sector in the extent to which workers in the ECEC workforce have these skills and attributes. Within UnitingCare Children's Services there is a strong commitment of staff at all levels to ensure that our services are inclusive of children with a disability. We

³⁶ [www.courses.mq.edu.au/public/view/2011/Undergraduate/Degree/Bachelor+of+Teaching+\(Early+Childhood+Services\)](http://www.courses.mq.edu.au/public/view/2011/Undergraduate/Degree/Bachelor+of+Teaching+(Early+Childhood+Services))

³⁷ Kronemann, op cit.

³⁸ Boardmaker is a database of picture communication symbols that can be used to design communication boards, calendars etc)

have seen the positive outcomes that this creates in promoting positive attitudes and acceptance of difference.

However, we are unsure of the extent to which staff in some services are supported to provide effective inclusion support strategies. Anecdotally, families that enrol children with disabilities in our centres often report that private centres they have approached have said that they are not able to meet the child's needs.

What additional skills or support might they require in order to do so?

There are several issues relating to how early childhood services are resourced to support the inclusion of children with special needs. Currently, provision of government funding to support inclusion of children with special needs is both fragmented and inadequate.

For example, UnitingCare Children's Services receives funding from the Department of Education and Training under the Intervention Support Program (ISP). This allows for employment of a part-time Inclusion Support Worker four days a week who currently provides consultancy and support across 28 centres.

Children's services are also eligible to receive small amounts of funding to employ additional staff, based on the number of children they have with additional needs:

- Children's services funded by NSW Community Services can apply for *Supporting Children with Additional Needs* (SCAN) funding from the Department of Community Services.
- Non-profit state-funded services can receive small amounts of additional funding from DET under the *Intervention Support Program* for children with disabilities.
- Australian Government child care services are eligible to apply for the *Inclusion Support Subsidy* as a contribution towards the costs associated with including a child with ongoing high support needs.

However, NSW SCAN funding generally does not cover the cost of an additional child care worker to work directly with a child. More generally, the programs at both Commonwealth and state levels to support the inclusion of children with disabilities and other special needs do not provide ongoing operational support and are of limited duration. Additional resources are required to allow workers to liaise with parents, attend case planning meetings and work collaboratively with other service providers.

Further, workers employed in ECEC services under the SCAN and ISS programs are employed on short term contracts. Generally, they are employed as Child Care Workers to provide additional primary contact staff in

the room to support inclusion, while the permanent teacher of director is responsible for program design and delivery to support the child. Lack of job security and uncertainty often leads staff to look for alternative employment (often before the contract is finished) and results in lack of staffing continuity. This can impact on the outcomes of children who need additional support.

Burnside Brighter Futures Early Childhood Facilitators

The Burnside Brighter Futures Early Childhood Facilitator model is another example of how ECEC staff can be supported to be inclusive of children with disabilities and other additional needs. Many of the children in Brighter Futures services have disabilities or challenging behaviours. The ECFs help centres to develop a behaviour management plan and work with the centres to review and monitor how the plan is going. Support may also include developing resources such as pictorial communication boards and linking the centre staff with other specialist support services. The case study at Appendix 1 illustrates the support provided by ECFs to support the inclusion of children with special needs.

It is our experience that over time, some ECEC centres have increased their comfort levels in taking on more children with special needs and challenging behaviours as they develop greater understanding of the needs of vulnerable families through the support provided by the ECFs. This has particularly been the case with some private centres that may not have previously had any experience in working with these children. Also, privately run ECEC centres have often been unaware of the availability of government funding support for children with special needs or how to access it.

Children from low socio-economic backgrounds

There is a body of international research which shows a strong relationship between cognitive and socio-emotional development and participation in high-quality centre-based care for children from low-income families. This research clearly indicates that quality teaching is required for programs to be successful. The longitudinal study conducted for SureStart on the *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education*, for example, found that disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences but make more progress in settings that have staff with higher qualifications.³⁹

However, as a recent research paper prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth notes, a national shortage of university-trained early childhood teachers means that ECEC services often rely upon vocationally trained and unqualified staff who are less likely to provide a consistent high-quality educational environment.⁴⁰ Research has shown that 'sustained shared thinking' is a key factor in the delivery of high-quality early childhood education and care. 'Sustained shared thinking' involves

³⁹ Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Blatchford, I S., Taggart, B. and Elliot, K., 2003, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period*, Institute of Education, University of London.

⁴⁰ Hilferty, F., 2009, *The Implications of Poverty on Children's Readiness to Learn*, Focusing paper prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

interactions between staff and children that are ‘two way’ and involve conversations that focus on working together to explore concepts, extend stories and solve problems. It has been found that degree-qualified early childhood teachers in teaching and management roles are more likely to develop and lead these interactions with children.⁴¹

As a provider of Brighter Futures, Burnside works with a range of children’s services across the community and private sector. Our experience is that ECEC staff need to have a better understanding of issues impacting on vulnerable families including the impact of poverty and more effective interagency networks. Responding to children at risk of harm or where there are child protection concerns is an area where ECEC staff would benefit from additional training and support.

In their study on promoting children’s social and emotional wellbeing in 20 ECEC services located in low socioeconomic areas, Davis et al, found that many centres did not know about local community services, and those centres that did promote community links tended to use passive strategies, reliant on parents requesting information or having the time and ability to read newsletters or noticeboards within the centre.⁴² This is consistent with our experience and the findings of earlier research by the Healthy Childhood Research Group in NSW on the need for improved linkages between ECEC services and other community services.⁴³

Attendance at inter-sectoral networks potentially provide an effective vehicle to support increased inter-sectoral contact and understanding. However, ECEC services require additional resources such as staff relief time to attend such meetings and to build and maintain links with maternal and child health services and parenting support services.

7 Lessons from other sectors and other countries

The United Kingdom (UK) *2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy*⁴⁴ includes measures to embed in education, training and professional development:

- shared values and a common core of skills and knowledge
- clarity about how to work together, when and why
- a shared approach to assessment planning, intervention and review.

In 2005, the Government and Children’s Workforce Development Council published the *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge* for the children and

⁴¹ Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R., and Bell, D., 2002, *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years. DfES Research Report*, 356, Department for Education and Skills, London.

⁴² Davis et al, op cit.

⁴³ Hayden, J., MacDonald, J. and Fraser, D (2001) ‘Health promotion, Social Determinants and the role of the early childhood setting’, *Bedrock*, 2: 8-11.

⁴⁴ <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publication&ProductId=DCSF-01052-2008>

young people's workforce. This sets out the skills and knowledge which are required for someone working with children to practise at a basic level and is intended to enable multi-disciplinary teams to work together more effectively in the interests of the child.

The Common Core is intended to support the development of a common language for people working with children and young people, for use within qualifications, training, induction and recruitment practices. It also informs the review and development of National Occupational Standards and is embedded in all qualifications that go into the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF). The IQF is intended to support progression and mobility across the children's workforce, as qualifications are developed with improved links between them.

The skills and knowledge included in the Common Core are divided into six key areas:

- effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families
- child and young person development
- safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child or young person
- supporting transitions
- multi-agency and integrated working
- information sharing.

'Multi-agency working' incorporates, for example:

- skills relating to communication and teamwork
- having a general knowledge and understanding of the range of organisations working with children and families and the roles and responsibilities of other professionals
- understanding the way other services operate in order to work effectively with them.

The approach recognises that the use of the Common Core will vary by sector and role, and that different organisations will find the most appropriate way of giving expression to the six areas of expertise. Some occupational roles will place greater emphasis on one or more of the common core's six headings, for example, not all practitioners will be involved in supporting transition. But all practitioners will need to understand at least the most important aspects of each of the six areas of expertise.

At this point, the implementation of the Early Years Framework and other reforms under the National Quality Framework are the highest priority in the sector. However, there may be opportunity to build a similar approach to the Common Core within a long term policy framework. Also, the UK Common Core does offer valuable insights on some of the knowledge and skills areas that are likely to be important in building the capacity of the ECD workforce to work in a more integrated way.

Another noteworthy initiative currently being established under the *2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy* is a development program

which will offer structured training and support to every Director of children's services and those close to taking on this role. The National College of School Leadership has been asked to develop the program, in partnership with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Children's Workforce Development Council. The program will have a particular focus on leading integrated services and equipping directors with the skills to lead partnerships and manage different professional groups.

Appendix 1 – Brighter Futures Case Study

Background

Rebecca is a woman from Sierra Leone who came to Australia six years ago with her family to escape the atrocities that was occurring there. She has two sons aged 12 and 14 and twin girls aged three. One of the twins, Kelly, has a severe developmental delay. Rebecca has recently moved into the area to escape from domestic violence.

Early Childhood Facilitator Intervention

After meeting with the family, and identifying the need for high-quality children's services, the ECF started ringing child care centres in the area, most of which had no vacancies as it was towards the end of the year. A few of the centres said they had no vacancies for children with special needs as they already had children with special needs and didn't feel that their staff could cope with more and still deliver quality care for that centre.

The ECF found a child care centre in the next suburb with vacancies. She visited the centre to observe their practice and their play areas and to explain about Kelly's special needs. Kelly does not walk but gets around by shuffling on her bottom. She also uses a walker but doesn't like it. Kelly is non verbal, not toilet trained and rarely follows direction.

The ECF then made contact with KU Inclusion Services (which is an Inclusion Support Agency funded by the Australian Commonwealth). This is a service that is utilised by the child care centres to support them to work effectively with children with special needs. They will give advice and special funding for extra staff, if needed, to the staff at the centre. The ECF set up a meeting with the centre, KU and Rebecca to ensure that the placement would be a success for the family as well as the centre. She advocated for Rebecca throughout the meeting and helped her with the documentation needed to enrol at the centre and receive additional funding to support Kelly.

The girls started at the centre the next week. They are enjoying their time at the centre and Rebecca is benefitting from the opportunity to have time to attend to other priorities for herself and the children. The placement has been a success as the staff are now confident that they will give quality care to Kelly and her sister with the professional support of Burnside and KU as needed.