Early Childhood Development Workforce Study
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EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WORKFORCE

CCC response to Productivity Commission Issues Paper Nov 2010

Community Child Care (CCC) as the peak body for community based children's services in Victoria is pleased to submit a response to the Productivity Commission Issues Paper on the Early Childhood Development Workforce.

CCC wishes to emphasise the importance of the use of terminology – referring to the sector as early childhood education and care is a more inclusive term.

CCC is the Victorian branch of a national peak body Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS). We support the ACCS submission and have drawn on the ACCS survey results as evidence for our responses.

Scope of the study

Qn 1 - Given the terms of reference, is the suggested scope of the ECD workforce appropriate for the purposes of this study?

Use of the term 'childcare' is unhelpful in ensuring that all relevant early childhood development workers are included. It is preferable for the Commission to use the term coined by the OECD 'early childhood education and care' as a more inclusive term.

Qn 2 - Which ECD services for children with additional needs should the Commission include in this study?

CCC believes the Productivity Commission study should include anyone who works with children from birth to 8 years of age – the whole 'team around the child'.

Qn 3 - What are some other examples of integrated and co-located services? What are the benefits and limitations of integrating and co-locating ECD services?

The Centre for Community Child Health refer to 'integrating services [as] the process of building connections between services of different types so as to create a system that is more comprehensive and cohesive as well as services being more accessible and more responsive' (CCCH 2009; p1)

In Victoria there are 63 integrated children's centres providing early childhood education and care, maternal and child health and other child and family services such as early intervention, family support and/or counselling services.

CCC is committed to supporting flexible and responsive delivery of high quality children's services, matched to local community need and demand, delivered in a way which enables civic participation to strengthen communities.

We recognise that the integration of child and family services is one means to these ends. Integration can contribute to these goals by:

1. Making services easier to access for children and families
2. Enabling professionals to collaborate across disciplines
3. Reducing fragmentation in service delivery
4. Increasing capacity to respond to diverse and changing needs
5. Enabling families and children to receive seamless holistic education, care, health and welfare services

The hallmarks of integrated child and family services are:

- Shared physical space (a building or a precinct)
- Shared information, in a climate of trust and respect
- Shared resources such as enrolment forms, planning days, funds, etc
- A shared vision (including a commitment to improving the qualitative experiences of integrated support, especially among children and their families)
- Cross disciplinary collaboration between the different professionals who work in the service

Integration is an ambitious and complex undertaking and there is no one right way. Nor is it a single event, but rather an ongoing process which requires integrated thinking, leadership and dedicated resources. We believe that understanding local context is critical to developing a model for integration that meets the needs of local stakeholders. We also argue that, for any model of integration to be successful, attention must be given to issues of governance, management, leadership, funding arrangements, service delivery, professional practice, different industrial conditions for different professionals, evaluation and a carefully planned and fully resourced transition process.

This is supported by the Centre for Community Child Health which believes that although 'research evidence is very limited, existing evidence suggests that integrated service delivery has benefits for children, families and professionals' (CCCH 2009; p4).

Early childhood education and care workforce

Qn 4 - Does this list provide comprehensive coverage of formal childcare settings? Is this an adequate representation of the broad roles and responsibilities of childcare and preschool workers? What characteristics describe the childcare and preschool workforces — in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction?

CCC believes that currently the early childhood education and care workforce is characterised by staff that are undervalued, underpaid and overworked. The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) represents more than 95 000 early childhood education and care workers in Australia and also identifies low pay and poor career prospects as issues causing the serious skills crisis (LHMU 2008; p15).

Despite the challenges facing the sector CCC also recognises the opportunities; the current Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Early Years reforms will lead to greater professionalization in the sector. The Victorian Government has invested in workforce initiatives to support new workers, upskill existing early childhood education and care workers and invested in a leadership program for the sector through the Bastow Institute. CCC refers the Productivity Commission to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 'Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce' document which is available online
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/resources/workforce.htm

Child health and family support workforces (health workforce mostly outside scope of study)

Qn 5 - What characteristics describe the child health and family support workforces — in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction?

CCC has no comment for this question.

Workforce for children with additional needs

Qn 6 - What characteristics describe the workforce that provides services to children with additional needs — in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction?

CCC has no comment for this question.

Data describing the ECD workforce

Qn 7 - What data collections provide information on the ECD sector and its workforce?

- Child Care Census – although not the same questions are asked each time

- NATSEM -National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling 'Who Cares for School Age Kids: Staffing Trends in Outside School Hours Care' 2010 – available online at http://www.canberra.edu.au/centres/natsem/publications

- National Children's Services Workforce Survey 2006

- HILDA – The Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey available online at http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/

- LSAC – Longitudinal Study of Australian Children available online at http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/

For the purposes of providing an evidence based response for this Productivity Commission ECD Issues Paper, Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) of which CCC is the Victorian branch and National Secretariat surveyed our members on the issues currently facing the workforce. Results are in attachment 1 and full details of quotes used throughout this submission are available on request.

Governments' current role in the ECD sector

Qn 8 - How do the differing roles and policies of governments affect the planning and provision of the ECD workforce?

CCC believes that a nationally consistent system of accreditation for the early childhood education and care workforce would ease the complications that currently exist through varying policies in different jurisdictions.

Each jurisdiction has its own workforce strategies. As mentioned in Question 4 the Victorian Government has been successful in developing initiatives to attract and retain the early childhood education and care workforce.

Qn 9 - Are there examples of jurisdictions or councils with effective policies and programs that could be usefully transferred and applied in other areas of Australia? How might these data collections be improved?

CCC has no comment for this question.

COAG agreements and frameworks affecting ECD

Qn 10 - Are there other significant policies governing the ECEC, child health and family support sectors and their workforces that the Commission should be aware of?

CCC believes this is a comprehensive list.

Demand for early childhood education and care workers

Qn 11 - What are some of the child development reasons families choose to use, or not use, different ECEC services? How is this changing over time?

In 2007 CCC gathered data from families across Victoria about their experience of community owned and managed children's services; it reveals the families in this study value partnerships and a real connection that encourages different types of involvement and which is focused on shared decision making about the education and care of their children despite challenges and constraints on family involvement. For these families community owned services are places where connectedness with families and the local community and responsiveness to local and individual family needs are paramount (Community Child Care 2007; p3).

There is a continuing strong demand for formal ...child care (Elliott 2006; p 16). Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Census data summary indicates that there are increasing numbers of children attending 'child care' (DEEWR 2008; p12)

Labour force participation

Qn 12 - To what extent is female labour force participation influenced by the availability of formal childcare? How might the demand for ECEC services be affected by changes to female labour force participation?

CCC refers the Productivity Commission to research which shows 'women with children under five are more likely to be in paid employment than in the past...But women can only return to work if they can find and afford centre-based child care, obtain paid or familial home-based care, and/or activate flexible workplace arrangements' (Elliott 2006; p12).

Qn 13 -To what extent does the relative cost of ECEC services determine the demand for those services?

The market power of families is extremely limited due to lack of choice in the child care

sector. In most communities there is a lack of places in alternative services, and in some geographically isolated communities there is a lack of alternative centre based services.

When child care fees increase a decision is made in some families to withdraw from the workforce in order to care for the children resulting in the loss of skills and labour from the economy and a loss of career engagement for the parents. Most families however are not able to seriously consider this option as having both parents working is a necessity.

Many families will tolerate extremely high fees that absorb much of the earnings of the prime care giver, in the interests of maintaining a foothold in the workforce. (Community Child Care 2009; Submission to The Australian Treasury)

Demand for child health workers

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

CCC has no comment for this question.

Demand for family support workers

Qn 15 - What factors affect the demand for, and the skills required of, the family support workforce?

CCC does not have a comment for this question.

Future demand for ECD workers

Qn 16 - How might the proposed qualification standards, staffing levels, and the implied mix of skills and knowledge assist the delivery of the desired outcomes for children?

International research shows that 'early experience affects the development of the brain and lays the foundation for intelligence, emotional health and moral development' (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000 in Elliott 2006; p21). CCC believes that the proposed standards – which require a skilled workforce - will increase the quality of early childhood education and care services and consequently will have a positive impact on children's wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Qn 17- What effect will the new standards and targets have on demand for ECD workers?

CCC expects that there will be an increased demand for qualified early childhood education and care workers.

Qn 18 - What options are available for funding the increased wages and salaries of more highly qualified ECD workers?

CCC believes that there are 2 options;

- Increase fees and subsequently increase Child Care Benefit to ensure services remain affordable for families
- Direct subsidies from government tied to staffing levels and qualifications

Qn 19 - How will increased fertility rates, changing family structures, the introduction of paid parental leave and other demographic, social and policy factors affect the <u>demand</u> for ECD services and ECD workers?

If more babies are being born and there are more parents in the workforce, we would expect demand will increase for both places and workers. But CCC does not want to see uncontrolled growth.

CCC as the Victorian branch of ACCS refers to the ACCS policy position on planning controls. The Australian Government has an important role in developing planning legislation for all service types (long day care, occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care, in-home care) that ensures that families have access to not-for-profit community owned children's services, allowing families' choice in child care. Australia needs a system that allows and encourages the development of community owned services, while preventing new commercial for-private-profit services from opening where they will undermine the viability of existing services.

Options for achieving this include:

- A cap on CCB places for for-profit services in communities where the community based service has vacancies, or where there are existing private services with vacancies
- Denial of CCB approval for new for-profit services in communities where there is no community based service or where the for-profit service will be located in close proximity to an existing community based service
- Government capital investment to develop community based services in communities where none exist and where there is evidence of viability.

Planning systems such as this are successfully applied in other industry sectors. For example, the National Health Act 1953 controls the location of pharmacies that are approved to dispense pharmaceutical benefits, taking into account the distance from the nearest approved pharmacy and the resident population in the catchment area.

ACCS believes that the Federal Government could develop similar legislation in regard to approval of children's services for Child Care Benefit fee relief, which takes into account ownership and location.

ACCS goal is for Federal child care planning policy that will:
- Build Australian community capacity and empower families
- Retain, grow and strengthen the community based children's services sector
- Provide **all** Australian families with the choice to utilise not-for-profit community based children's services

(The full document outlining ACCS policy position on planning controls can be downloaded from the ACCS website www.ausccs.org.au).

It is possible that the introduction of a Paid Parental Leave scheme will result in fewer young babies being in early childhood education and care services, as it could be assumed that parents will stay at home with their babies longer**.**

Supply of ECD workers

Qn 20 - Do providers of ECD services have difficulties finding staff? If so, are these problems more pronounced in some ECD occupations or in some areas of Australia? Why is this the case?

The ACCS survey results indicate that the higher the qualification required the more difficult it is to recruit staff in that category. Where a service employs a diploma and/or degree qualified educators, the majority of the time it is 'always difficult' to recruit in these categories (Attachment 1, table 1 and table 1a**)**.

Of the services that recruit directors, 61% of the responses indicated this was always difficult .

34% of respondents do not recruit unqualified early childhood assistants, while 51% of responses for services employing Certificate III staff found it sometimes difficult (Attachment 1, table 1a)

A small number of responses to the ACCS survey indicated that being located in a rural area offers more difficulties in recruiting staff;

CCC believes that other issues facing remote communities compound the problem of staff recruitment and retention eg housing availability.

The issues facing the early childhood education and care sector are covered well within the Workplace Research Centre research roundtable briefing paper. This describes 'skill atrophy' in the child care sector - 'Low wages, work intensification and negative perceptions of the quality of work offered are issues of significant concern to the sustainability to the sector. These problems have flow on effects in the form of high turnover, resulting in the casualisation of the workforce, skills shortages and a consequent lack of focus and investment on skill development. This has become a self perpetuating cycle' (Workplace Research Centre 2010; p4)

The paper goes on to say 'although there is a high incidence of turnover in the sector, it should be noted that the child care sector workforce is also characterised by a small group of long term workers who remain committed to their employment in spite of the low pay and poor working conditions. This has been referred to by Simms (2006) as the 'exploitation of vocational passion' (cited in Bretherton, 2010) from (Workplace Research Centre 2010; p4).

CCC directs the Productivity Commission's to the impact the staff shortage has on the availability of relief and backfill staff which CCC believes is more pronounced in the Outside School Hours Care sector due to the often split shifts and short hours. This impacts on continuity of care which has been identified as an important component of quality care which impacts on child development (Elliott 2006; p32).

Qn 21 - 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?

The survey of ACCS members revealed that low wages are a significant factor in difficulties filling positions.

This is an issue CCC believes will be of increasing importance with the policy focus shifting to the integration of services to ensure a holistic approach to early childhood education and care.

Staff retention and turnover

Qn 22 - To what extent are ECEC, child health and family support services experiencing staff retention issues? Are there examples of effective staff retention strategies in the ECD sector? How might such strategies be replicated throughout Australia?

The ACCS survey asked whether services experience difficulty retaining staff for more than 12 months ranging from unqualified Early Childhood Assistants to Directors (refer to Attachment 1, Table 3 and 3a). From these results it appears the higher the qualification of the staff the more difficult it is to retain them in a service.

There is evidence to indicate that the confusing array of Industrial Awards and staff classifications that result in low salaries and impact negatively on staff recruitment, retention and progression (Elliott 2006; p54 and LHMU 2008; p15).

On the question of effective staff retention strategies, the Workplace Research Centre in Sydney released a briefing paper in 2010 looking at innovative responses by employers to address the 'low skill – low wage nexus' (Workplace Research Centre 2010, p5).

There were 6 strategies used by best practice employers to develop skilled labour and these were;

> 1 – Lift the economic and social value of work
>
> 2- Use of stable employment structures as part of a wider strategy to reduce staff turnover
>
> 3 – Clarify customer need, and use this to rally staff development
>
> 4 - Create opportunities for professionals to mobilise in order to lay the foundation for reconstruction of core skills in the sector
>
> 5 – Expand options for funding, but with a view to lifting quality in service and quality of employment
>
> 6 – Harness the enthusiasm of workers to engage in training.

(taken from Workplace Research Centre 2010, pp6-7)

The ACCS Survey asked what strategies were used to retain staff (Attachment 1, Table 4). Funded Professional Development, Above Award Pay and Additional Planning Time were all nominated by the respondents as a strategy 'always' used to retain staff. On the other end of the scale, Additional Leave was responded to as a strategy 'Never' used to retain staff. In the qualitative responses some respondents indicated they use family friendly policies and 'flexibility' as a strategy to retain staff, and a few services said they offer rostered days off (RDO's) to retain staff.

CCC believes a formal mentor scheme for new graduates as exists in the Education sector could be valuable in retaining staff in the early childhood education and care sector.

Qn 23 - How might these be replicated throughout Australia?

More funding on the supply side of early childhood education and care – ie direct government funding of services tied to demonstrated effectiveness in staff recruitment and retention. This sits better with the COAG reforms which are aimed at increasing quality rather than the past policies of demand side economics.

Pay and conditions

Qn 24 - What are the key factors influencing an individual's decision to work in the ECD sector? Do these vary for different ECD occupations?

Given the diversity of individuals working in the sector, the answer to this question remains mostly speculative. However, in speculating, it can be assumed that the notion of 'care' plays a role in the reason why people work in the early childhood education and care sector.

This is being increasingly revealed as a problematic term. Dina Bowman presented at a Brotherhood of St Laurence policy symposium in Melbourne in October 2010, there is an increasing awareness of the need to better understand 'the interrelationship of economy and society. The market is embedded in society, but too often this is recast so that the social is considered as secondary to the economy'.

This results in an 'undervaluation of care' which 'has implications across the life course, in private and public spheres, in families, communities and the labour market' (Prepared by Bodsworth, E; Summary of the BSL Symposium 'Care, Social Inclusion and Citizenship' 25 October 2010).

Under Question 20 CCC referred to the 'exploitation of vocational passion' and it is an issue that can be partially attributed to the sector not being highly unionised – or at least not as well unionised as the school/education sector, where it is anecdotally understood many early childhood education and care workers go to earn 'higher wages and have better working conditions' (Workplace Research Centre 2010, p4).

Qn 25 - Why are ECD workers paid less than those working in related sectors? Are the wages and salaries for workers in different ECD occupations appropriate, given the skills and qualifications required? If not, how might this best be addressed?

CCC believes a contributing factor to the low wages is that the early childhood education and care sector is not highly unionised.

CCC believes the wages and salaries of different workers are not always appropriate – we are aware of a service in which a degree qualified teacher, with an additional degree, works in a room with 3 and four year olds and is paid $23.70 per hour, whereas her

colleague – also a teacher – works in a Kindergarten room and is paid $32 per hour although both work at the same service. This is a serious discrepancy in wages.

CCC would support one award covering all levels of qualifications for early childhood education and care professionals.

Regulatory burden

Qn 26 - Does the regulatory burden have a significant impact on attracting or retaining staff in the ECD sector? Do you expect recently announced reforms to make a material difference to the regulatory burden facing ECD workers? What more could be done to reduce the regulatory burden?

The ACCS survey showed most respondents found the burden on staff of meeting regulations significant. (Attachment 1,Table 2). However less than half found it 'often' or 'always' significant and other factors were much more significant in making it difficult to fill positions.

CCC believes that focussing on a reduction of regulatory burden is problematic. Regulation is an important requirement to ensure the safety and well being of children in services and this should not be compromised. Effort to ease difficulties in recruitment is better directed to improving training and wages.

Qualifications and career pathways

Getting started in the ECD workforce

Qn 27 - How appropriate are the qualifications required for entry into various ECD occupations? Do differences in qualification requirements restrict workers' ability to move between jurisdictions or ECD sectors?

The majority of respondents to the ACCS survey indicate that the Diploma for Educators and Degree for Teachers are 'highly appropriate' for entry into various early childhood education and care occupations (Attachment 1, table 5). However a significant number see these qualifications as only 'somewhat appropriate' and more than 10% believe the early childhood degree for teachers is 'not appropriate'.

CCC believes that high quality is built on a culture of continuous skill development and therefore there should be support for all qualification levels – including the entry level Certificate III - to upgrade.

Restrictions across jurisdictions should be reduced through a nationally regulated system.

Qn 28 - Do newly-qualified ECD workers have the necessary skills and attributes to be effective in the workplace?

The majority of respondents to the ACCS survey believed that Newly Qualified Certificate III assistants, Newly Qualified Diploma Qualified Educator and Newly Qualified Degree Qualified Teachers 'sometimes have necessary skills' to be effective in the workplace (Attachment 1, Table 6).

A few themes arose from the comments including the importance of on the job experience, variations in the training institutions from which the qualification is obtained, and the importance of ensuring courses are practical as well as theoretical;

CCC believes comprehensive, robust theoretical components of courses are important to underpin the practical skills.

CCC has concerns about the range of quality in the recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes and courses provided by training providers.

Qn 29 - To what extent are qualification requirements a barrier to entering the ECD sector? How could any such barriers be overcome? Do people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds face particular barriers to obtaining entry-level ECD qualifications?

CCC believes that the skill/supply gap in early childhood education and care could are in part explained by 'the inherent separation between VET and higher education systems, with an apparent absence of strategy of how to merge the two' (Workplace Research Centre 2010, p5). CCC also believes there should be an improved system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

CCC cannot comment on the second part of this question.

Career pathways and professional development

Qn 30 - Are workers who obtain additional skills and qualifications sufficiently rewarded? Is expertise sufficiently recognised and valued? How could opportunities for career progression within the ECD sector be enhanced?

Qualitative responses from the ACCS survey indicate that many respondents are able to offer sufficient reward to workers (ACCS Survey 2010, question 12).

Examples of how sufficient reward is offered to workers who obtain additional skills and qualifications included wage increases, days off, and professional development opportunities including study leave.

The key reason services do not offer sufficient reward is a lack of funds.

Services value and recognise the expertise of educators (ACCS Survey question 13), in practical ways such as through increased pay and planning time, through open communication on skills acquired and through providing celebratory functions when possible and appropriate.

> *'Verbal appreciation and celebration of innovative and excellent ideas. We have a paid discussion group which encourages sharing ideas, and recognises individual effort. Parent feedback (they know good quality when they see it) always passed on. Committee appreciation – social events, bonuses etc. Mutual support, management publicises professionalism of educators, and uses appropriate education based terms in publications' (Response 23, question 13, ACCS Survey)*

This strategy shows respect for educators, and demonstrates a culture within the service which values the professional role of educators.

Conversely on the question of what holds services back from recognising and valuing expertise further, the key responses were the challenges of the hours in the Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) sector and money.

On the question of how could career progression within the early childhood education and care sector be enhanced, responses pointed to better pay and conditions including the proposal;

> *'All staff in the ECEC sector paid under ONE award' (Response 48, question 15, ACCS Survey 2010)*

This points to another barrier – there are very limited career pathways that actively encourage a highly qualified person to stay working face to face with children in an early childhood education and care service. No modern award recognises qualifications higher than an undergraduate degree.

Other responses included support for study through affordable courses and covering staff undertaking professional development, and integrated services offering an opportunity for career progression.

Qn 31 - Are in-service training and professional development programs meeting workforce development needs? Are there barriers to ECD staff accessing training and development programs? If so, how could such barriers be overcome?

Staff working in rural and remote children's services face additional challenges accessing training and development programs. These additional challenges include not having a peer or mentor in a geographically close location, often needing to undertake study externally or with no or limited face to face interactions, lack of easy access to

study and library resources, and computer download speed and capacity in some rural and remote regions.

Professional status of the ECD workforce

Qn 32 - 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?

The overwhelming majority of respondents to the ACCS Survey (93%) consider community recognition of professional status to be an issue for the early childhood education and care workforce (Attachment 1, table 7).

Respondents acknowledge that regulations, frameworks and increased qualification requirements will have a positive impact on the professional status of the workforce. Multiple responses refer to media playing a role in the perception of professional status and the value of more positive media representation and more reporting on the beneficial aspects of early childhood education and care – including the benefits of the new regulatory frameworks - to enhance community understanding.

Respondents identified the perception of the 'care' role as holding the sector back as well as the lack of funding for children's services to perform their important role – here is one response that covers most of the issues;

> *'Community culture*
> *Low wages*
> *Government policies – not putting the funds behind the programs*
> *Poorly qualified staff' (Response 46, Question 18, ACCS Survey 2010)*

Change is needed on many levels – in building the self perception of educators in early childhood education and care services, building public awareness of the critical importance of learning in the first three years of life, improving the industrial conditions in the sector, strengthening government support for early childhood education and care through funding and a continued commitment to building the quality of the system.

International research indicates that the effects of these changes will result in 'longer term benefits through consistently better school performance, increased school retention, increased higher education participation, decreased anti-social behaviours, and a later start to parenting' (Campbell et al., 2002 in Elliot, A. 2006; p24).

Future supply of ECD workers

Qn 33 - Will the supply of qualified ECD workers expand sufficiently to meet COAG's objectives? How might the training of additional workers be funded?

The supply of qualified early childhood education and care workers can expand sufficiently if all levels of government invest in workforce issues such as those funded by the Victorian government in recent years. CCC refers the Productivity Commission to the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care website for more information on these strategies http://www.education.vic.gov.au/default.htm

Quality of training courses and providers

Qn 34 - Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector?

CCC has significant concerns about the variable quality of training providers both in VET and higher education courses. CCC members report significant and on-going problems in recruiting qualified staff with sufficient skills and knowledge.

This is consistent with the ACCS survey which found most respondents report that early childhood education and care training courses are only 'sometimes' of sufficient quality to meet the services needs in delivering early childhood education and care services (Attachment 1, Table 8). 18% of respondents said the early childhood education and care training courses were not meeting the service's needs.

Given that Registered Training Organisations exist in a poorly regulated sector, it is also of concern to CCC there has been inconsistent information given to the Victorian sector in regard to making complaints to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) about the skill level of new graduates. Despite our best efforts it remains unclear how children's services providers can contribute to lifting the quality of pre service training.

Qn 35 - What can be done to ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled trainers to meet future increases in demand for training?

CCC does not have a comment on this question.

Productivity of the ECD workforce

Qn 36 - What is the scope for productivity improvements in the ECD sector?

The question of productivity improvement is interesting in the context of early childhood education and care. Increasing productivity simply cannot simply mean increasing the number of children in a service as high ratios of staff to children are a component of high quality (EPPE 2004; p28). The Workplace Research Centre suggest what productivity means in the context of early childhood education and care.

'...Productivity is embedded in the interactions between worker and child and obtaining high quality outcomes for children. High productivity is defined in terms of quality of care which is widely recognised to include:

- Continuity of employment, enabling consistency of care and providing for skill development over a longer term period

- Commitment to offer lower child:staff ratios than required by the statutory minimum

- A service philosophy that combines care and education

- Employers supporting further staff development' (Workplace Research Centre 2010 pp 5-6)

Therefore increasing productivity is linked to increasing the quality of early childhood education and care, which the current Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reforms are designed to ensure.

Productivity improvements can be achieved be ensuring every children's service provides high quality education and care so no opportunity is missed for supporting the learning and development of every child participating in an early childhood education and care service.

Workforce planning

Qn 37 - Have initiatives to increase the supply of ECD workers been effective?

The Victorian Government has successfully invested in initiatives such as; financial support to attract more people to the early childhood education and care workforce and support skill upgrades, investing to increase networking and professional learning and investing in leadership capacity through customised leadership programs through the Bastow Institute. More information is available from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 'Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce' document which is available online http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/resources/workforce.htm

The ACCS survey asked whether services were aware of any government initiatives to increase the supply of early childhood education and care workers and although 74% of responses indicate that they are aware of government initiatives (Attachment 1,Table 9), 54% of respondents were 'unsure' if the initiatives have been effective (Attachment 1, Table 10).

26% of respondents said the Government initiatives were effective (Attachment 1, Table 10) with the most effective being those based on financial support to undertake courses and fee exemptions for training.

Suggestions for new initiatives that would help increase the supply of early childhood education and care workers, included fee exemptions as well as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Two responses indicated that reforms shouldn't be only about supply;

> *'it's about quality as well' (Response 2, Question 22 ACCS Survey)*

With another respondent suggesting;

> *'Limit the amount of training providers – so that a quality qualification is being handed out' (Response 43, Question 22 ACCS Survey)*

CCC also believes that the Recognition of Prior Learning system could be an effective strategy to increase the supply of early childhood education and care workers. CCC understands that in New Zealand there was a limited number of institutes permitted to assess Recognition of Prior Learning to ensure standards were maintained and treatment is consistent and fair. CCC also believes that a system of RPL would need fees to be controlled or subsidised to ensure affordability by low paid workers.

Qn 38 - Will the workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the ECD sector?

The ACCS survey responses were mixed on this question, although many responses indicate that staff within a service have either started to upgrade qualifications or will stay and upgrade;

> *'the right type of educators will upgrade their qualification – those that are passionate about their work. The others may not, but perhaps this is not such a bad thing in the long run.. It may make it more difficult to recruit qualified educators though' (Response 34, Question 23 ACCS Survey)*

However ACCS believes it is not wise to build the future of the early childhood education and care system on the back of altruism from passionate staff members. Wages and conditions featured in responses from those who expanded on why people would leave, including the lack of reward in wages for upgrading qualifications.

Integration of ECD services

Qn 39 - 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 services managers?

CCC responses to Questions 3 and 21 address the topic of integrated services. Responses to the ACCS survey refer to the need for staff in integrated centres to be 'team players' and able to work with other professions in a different way than in a dedicated early childhood education and care service.

Survey responses also identify that integrated services offer an opportunity for career progression that is not otherwise available.

There is a common misperception that co-ordinators of services which make up the mix of child and family services can simply extend their normal role to support the development of new ways of governing, managing and delivering services and engaging the community in an integrated setting. Experience has shown that the skills of leading this kind of fundamental culture change are very different to those required to co-ordinate a child care service, or a maternal and child health service for example. Further the workload associated with creating new models is significant and cannot be successfully managed on top of the busy and demanding role of co-ordinating components of the service (Community Child Care Budget Submission 2010 -11).

A specialised integrated services manager position would greatly enhance the capacity of specialists within an integrated service to work in an integrated way.

CCC is not convinced that a generalised workforce would be beneficial and believes the Productivity Commission study should focus on an early childhood education and care system that can work in a cross disciplinary manner to enhance the education, health and well being outcomes for children.

Qn 40 - 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?

CCC believes that the involvement of multiple unions – in Victoria the Australian Education Union (AEU) and Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) – directs focus to the differences across the sector in their campaigns for membership. CCC believes there is no need for separate awards; different specialisations in the early childhood education and care sector can be retained under a single award

Demographic, social and policy changes

Qn 41 - How will the ageing of the population, the introduction of paid parental leave, and other demographic, social and policy changes affect the supply of ECD workers?

Contemporary Australian society provides many challenges to the early childhood education and care workforce – 'research suggests that the field is becoming increasingly complex and as a result Moore (2005) argued that "services no longer meet the needs of young children and families as effectively as they once did" (McDonald 2010; p1).

This supports an argument for ensuring 'post qualification development and training for professionals' to ensure services can respond to the changing needs of families and children (McDonald 2010).

Responses to the ACCS survey suggest that the requirement to upgrade qualifications may result in mature employees leaving the sector;

>*'some of our staff will upgrade. Older staff would rather retire' (Response 7, Question 23 ACCS Survey)*

Another survey response articulated a problem that underpins many of the issues facing contemporary society – a past built on 'male breadwinning' (Brennan 2009 p 11). When answering the question of how career progression could be enhanced;

>*'Being fully integrated into the school education system, with career paths, respect and recognition going both ways. This is unlikely to happen as long as early childhood is constrained by being a secondary industry, dependent on other women's wages for survival (ie we are limited in our ability to charge a fee that would allow wages that truly recognise the skill level of our staff) Response 21, Question 15 ACCS Survey*

This refers to the idea of 'women's work' and the low value placed thereon. As Brennan notes (2009) 'Mothers are far less likely to be employed than fathers, much less likely to work full time and more likely to be engaged in casual work' (2009; p5).

ECD workforce for Indigenous children

Qn 42 - 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?

CCC refers the Productivity Commission to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations for advice on this question.

Qn 43 - What strategies are being used to attract ECD workers from Indigenous communities and to build Indigenous workforce capability? How effective are these strategies?

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) funds Indigenous Professional Support Units in each State and Territory for a range of early childhood initiatives. More information is available from the DEEWR website http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/EarlyChildhood/Pages/default.aspx

ECD workforce for children with additional needs

Qn 44 - Do ECD workers have the skills to provide effective services to all the children who they regularly work with, including those with **disabilities** *and other special needs and from CALD or low SES backgrounds? What additional skills or support might they require in order to do so?*

A majority of respondents to the ACCS survey (54%) believe that early childhood development workers have the skills to provide effective services to all children (Attachment 1, Table 11). 39% felt that staff 'sometimes' have the skills required, whereas only 6% of respondents believe staff do not have the skills to provide effective services to all children.

CCC is cautious about these results. National Childcare Accreditation Council resources on quality trends (available online http://www.ncac.gov.au/reports_statistics/past_reports.asp#qtr) show that many services do fail in basic areas of quality and accreditation, which suggests significant skills deficits.

Suggestions for additional skills and support include ongoing professional development, and increased focus on these topics in pre-service training courses.

This commitment to ongoing professional development to build the skills of early childhood education and care professionals is supported by the Australian Institute of Family Studies Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia practice sheet 'Building the capacity of professionals through post-qualification training and development' (McDonald, 2010).

Qn 45- To what extent are workers from CALD backgrounds represented in the ECD sector?

CCC believes that in most areas of the early childhood education and care sector the workforce does not reflect community demographics, with Family Day Care being a possible exception.

Qn 46 - How appropriate are the remuneration and conditions for ECD workers for children with additional needs?

CCC does not have a comment on this question.

Qn 47 - Are there particular workforce issues for early childhood intervention workers? Is the expertise of such workers sufficiently recognised and valued? Are there career paths that enable early childhood intervention workers to remain within the ECD sector?

CCC does not have a comment on this question.

Lessons from other sectors and other countries

Qn 48 - What lessons can be learnt from the ECD sectors in other countries or from other sectors within Australia? What are some of the caveats that need to be taken into account when making comparisons across countries or across sectors?

CCC believes some industrial lessons can be learnt from the education sector, where there is a highly unionised workforce which has won significant improvements in status and standing reflected in improved wages and conditions.

It is useful to look at countries that are doing well in early childhood education and care- the Nordic countries have been identified as leaders. However there are differences to the Australian context - Nordic societies 'have clear views about childhood, gender equality and the responsibility of the state to support the education of citizens from the cradle to the grave. Their early childhood services are focussed on child development. Access to quality services is guaranteed by law, and participation of parents is encouraged, not least in the area of infant care, where parental leave is remunerated to a level that allows real parental choice' (Bennett 2001).

Nordic countries invest more in early childhood education and care than Australia does. An article on the UNICEF report 'The Children Left Behind' released in November 2010 reveals 'Australia is faring below the average of other developing countries in areas of early childhood development, youth suicide and levels of basic immunisation' (UNICEF 2010).

'The league table of 27 OECD countries shows that Australia spends one-quarter of the amount that the leading country, Finland, spends on early childhood education...

If these problems are not addressed they are going to have an effect on a sustainable social and economic well-being in the future' (UNICEF 2010).

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