



Productivity Commission Study on Early Childhood Development Workforce

Submission by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia

January 2011

Workforce Demand - Child Care

In addition to the combined submission made by the Department of Education in Western Australia on behalf of themselves, the Catholic Education Office and the Association for Independent School of WA, Catholic Education would like to make a further submission regarding the child care workforce. This was not included in the Department of Education submission as it does not impact upon their services, however, the Catholic Education Office is involved in the provision of child care in Western Australia.

Long Day Care

At present Catholic Education is operating long day care services on two school sites. These services offer care for children from age 2 -5 years. There are a range of diversely qualified staff working in these centres ranging from 4 year qualified early childhood teachers, diploma and certificate trained.

One of the challenges is to attract 4 year early childhood trained teachers to a child care setting given the salary and conditions offered in child care. The solution has been to offer salary and conditions the same as other early childhood teachers working in the preschool. This was also seen as an equity issue among the staff at the school. The decision has caused financial strain on the long day care service.

The equity issue is further exacerbated because the Supervising Officer of the long day care service, legally responsible for the operation of the service is diploma trained. This means the Supervising Officer's salary is significantly lower than the teacher's, yet she holds the responsibility for the operation of the service.

These issues will be increased as the National Quality Standards unfold and long day care services are required to employ 4 year trained teachers.

Outside School Hours Care

Catholic Education currently operates seven Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services on school sites. There are plans to increase the number of services offered in the future as the need for OSHC increases.

Western Australia (WA) has the lowest number of OSHC places per child in Australia. In 2006 the ratio was 1:14. In 2010 there were 235 OSHC licences in WA; only 53 of these were on or near a school site. The fees for OSHC in WA are higher than the remainder of Australia and the staffing of OSHC in WA is a constant challenge given the role of the resources industry.

In WA qualified staff have a range of qualifications from Certificate IV through to degree-qualified. Once again this creates equity issues as pay scales are not necessarily matched to qualification levels. These positions are difficult to fill given the pay and conditions. Places for unqualified staff are often filled by students on a casual basis, however, this is becoming more difficult to achieve as students find casual employment in other industries paying higher salaries. The lack of staff means children in care do not have consistent educators. It is well documented that consistency of educators in care settings is a key component of quality.

As the need for higher levels of qualifications occurs in OSHC the staffing of these programs will become even more problematic. Catholic Education is currently upskilling all the untrained staff in their OSHC services in an attempt to improve the staffing situation.

Qualifications

A key area of concern for many working in the early childhood arena at present is to gain clarity around the qualifications. As there have been a range of qualifications in this field over the years there is a great deal of confusion over what constitutes a 4 year tertiary trained teacher in the early childhood sector. Many qualifications have not included the birth to 3 components whilst others have focussed on this area but not been an education qualification. Others have many years of experience in an early childhood setting yet their qualification is in primary education. Similarly there is a range of Certificate III's and it is not clear at this stage what qualifications will be accepted. It is important to gain clarity around the qualifications in order to plan the workforce for the future.

Summary

The key points in this submission include:

- The pay rates for teachers in child care and school settings vary.
- There is a need to achieve equity between those working across care and education in relation to pay and conditions as they relate to duties and responsibilities.
- The challenge faced in staffing OSHC services.
- The issues that arise with a casual workforce.
- A need for clarity of qualifications in relation to both the 4 year teacher trained requirement and the Certificate III.
- The importance to require a birth-3 component in university courses, given these are the crucial years of development.