



Australian Education Union

Submission to

Productivity Commission

Early Childhood Development Workforce Study

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The Australian Education Union represents approximately 184,000 teachers and educators in the primary, secondary, early childhood and TAFE sectors throughout Australia. We welcome the opportunity to table this submission to the first stage of the Productivity Commission study on Early Childhood Development Workforce.

This submission addresses issues relating to the ECD workforce set out under the terms of reference provided by the Productivity Commission. The document *Early Childhood Development Workforce – Productivity Commission issues paper* (November 2010) also provides a large number of discussion questions. Rather than answer every question individually, this submission addresses the discussion questions most relevant to the work of AEU members, namely public sector¹ pre-school/early childhood education teachers and assistants/support staff under the most appropriate term of reference.

1. Factors affecting the current and future demand and supply for the ECD workforce, and the required mix of skills and knowledge, including:

a. Delivery of fully integrated ECD services including maternal and child health, childcare, preschool, family support services and services for those with additional needs;

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

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?

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?

¹ Government and government funded not for profit sector.

The *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education* endorsed by COAG in December 2008 provides that by 2013 every child in Australia will have access to a preschool program in the twelve months prior to full-time schooling for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year. The suite of regulatory reforms, including the expansion of the provision to 15 hours will impact upon demand for ECD workers in the sector and the qualifications workers in the sector will be expected to attain.

The NPA stipulates that the program must be delivered by “a four year qualified early childhood teacher”.² This will require a consequent increase in the four year university qualified ECE teaching workforce. Due to the requirement under the National Quality Framework that staff in licensed services attain a minimum Certificate III qualification³ increased training hours will also need to be provided for childcare workers and support service workers in particular.

The Early Childhood NPA notes that children living in remote Indigenous communities have been identified as a particular focus for universal access⁴, so expansion of the workforce serving Indigenous communities will also have to be a priority in all ECD workforce planning.

The AEU views the greater focus on Early Childhood Education within the Early Childhood NPA as a positive development. AEU policy states that universal access to high quality public Early Childhood Education and Care is integral to the educational, social, physical, moral and emotional development of children, consistent with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (ICRC)⁵, and associated resolutions and statements made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and/or adopted by the UN General Assembly. It is therefore commendable that the new *National Early Childhood Development Strategy – Investing in the Early Years*⁶, encompasses a child-centred, holistic approach to the reform of the system.

In this context, the AEU believes the goals outlined in the NPA are most effectively achieved through quality public provision which is free, of high and consistent standard, secular,

² COAG, (2008). *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education*, Part 2, 16.

³ COAG (2010). *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care: Information for Services*, p. 3. http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Documents/InfoForServices.pdf

⁴ Ibid, p. 6.

⁶ COAG (2009) *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/national_ECD_strategy.pdf

universally accessible and inclusive of all. In particular, the AEU believes that the profit motive is incompatible with governments' primary obligations to deliver quality education for all children, including Early Childhood Education. These issues will be discussed at greater length later in this submission.

There is strong evidence from national and international research that ECE is a highly effective investment in maximising a child's potential for educational and social development throughout her or his life and that this is particularly so for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.^{7 8} Research indicates that children placed in high quality ECE programs demonstrate better academic results as their education progresses, are less likely to repeat grades and are more likely to stay at school longer and proceed to higher education. They are also less likely later in life to have problems with the law or be on welfare.⁹ Other demonstrated advantages include better intellectual development, improved independence, concentration and sociability.¹⁰ These advantages are greater in school systems where pre-primary education lasts longer, where there are smaller pupil-to-teacher ratios at the pre-primary level and where there is higher public expenditure per pupil at this level of education.¹¹ Better outcomes were also found when staff had higher qualifications.¹²

Evidence indicates that effective outcomes from ECE depend strongly on the quality of ECE provided. This is recognised in the COAG *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*:

A number of studies, including EPPE, also point to the critical importance of high-quality in early childhood development programs for improving outcomes. Key aspects of quality linked to positive child outcomes include higher qualifications of the early childhood professionals, lower child-to-staff ratios and a strong relationship between the child and a stable caregiver.

⁷ Walker, K. (2004). *For All Our Children. National Preschool Education Inquiry Report*. Australian Education Union. Pp. 18-19. <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Ec/ecfullreport.pdf>

⁸ OECD, (2010). *PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background*. Vol. 2, pp. 95-98.

⁹ Watson, L. (2006). *Pathways to a Profession. Education and training in early childhood education and care, Australia*. Australian Government, Department of Education Science and Training. http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/pathways_to_a_profession.htm

¹⁰ Sylva K, Melhuish E, Sammons P, Siraj-Blatchford I and Taggart B (2004), *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education. (EPPE) Project Final Report*. London: The Institute of Education.

¹¹ OECD, (2010). *PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary*, p.16.

¹² Sylva K, et al, Op Cit.

Research also indicates that young children who spend excessive hours in poor-quality child care characterised by low staff qualifications and ratios and excessive staff turnover are more likely to have higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol and to develop social, emotional and behavioural problems.¹³

As the National Early Childhood Development Strategy emphasises, a key element in the delivery of quality ECE is the importance of Early Childhood Education being taught by qualified tertiary educated Early Childhood teachers. Evidence indicates that provision of ECE by fully qualified teachers is an essential element in quality provision of ECE which maximises the educational benefits of ECE and the long term learning and life opportunities of children.^{14 15}
¹⁶ The AEU believes this is an essential component of ECE delivery in all settings.

Accepted international definitions of Early Childhood Education reflected in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, state that the most appropriate qualification for ECE teachers is one which encompasses the 0-8 age range. These qualifications facilitate links with the early years of schooling and provide flexibility, allowing ECE teachers to work in a range of settings, as is already the case. For example, in Victoria there are dual qualified teachers, a 0-8 curriculum and a 0-8 qualification and the ACT government has recently established a number of early childhood schools which cater for children from birth to Year 2.

An essential component of quality delivery of ECE must therefore be a skilled and professional workforce, supported by systematic professional development aimed at building teacher capacity, with remuneration and career paths designed to attract and retain dedicated professionals to the industry. ECE is most effective when it has strong links with the early years of schooling in order to provide for continuity of pedagogy and learning.

¹³ COAG (2009) Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy, p. 35.
http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/national_ECD_strategy.pdf

¹⁴ Sylva K, et al, Op Cit.

¹⁵ Cleveland, G. and M. Krashinsky (2003), *Financing ECEC services in OECD countries*, paper presented at an OECD Early Childhood Education and Care workshop in Rotterdam, January, p. 53.

¹⁶ Moore T (2008), *Towards an early years learning framework for Australia CCCH Working Paper 4*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health

ECE in Australia occurs within a range of settings which span the disciplines of education and care. These include early childhood education settings which incorporate preschools, kindergartens and early childhood education units which may or may not be integrated with primary schools; primary schools; childcare settings including long day care and family day care; and early intervention programs for children with special needs.¹⁷

The AEU supports provision of ECE through integrated and/or co-located models, which provide pedagogical links with the early years of schooling and additional support and wrap-around services. The ACT's early childhood schools, for example, operate as early learning and development centres providing integrated services including ECE, childcare, healthcare, family support and counselling to assist parents and carers.¹⁸

In recent years South Australia has developed a series of *Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting* run by the Department of Education and Children's services, which provide integrated childcare, ECE, health, family and community services. Some provide targeted programs for young mothers in their teenage years attending high school. They also have strong links with the early years of schooling, with a number located on school sites.¹⁹ Similar public integrated centres exist in WA. In NSW 100 public schools have pre-schools attached. The preschool teachers are fully qualified teachers appointed to the host school.

The above-mentioned programs are models of effective public provision of integrated ECD services as they employ a range of qualified professionals in their respective areas under the banner of strong educational leadership and partnerships with different sectors. The AEU believes that in order to maximise links with the education sector, integrated models of Early Childhood Education and Care are best managed and supported by Departments of Education at state, territory and national levels.

¹⁷ AEU, (2007). Early Childhood Education Policy, 2.1 – 3.12.

<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Policy/EarlyChild2007.pdf>

¹⁸ Department of Education and Training (ACT). *Early Childhood Schools*.

http://www.det.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/early_childhood_schools

¹⁹ Department of Education and Children's Services (SA). *Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting*. <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/childrensservices/pages/earlychildhood/childrenscentres/?reFlag=1>

Given the success of these integrated models in forging stronger links and partnerships between the sectors, professionals working in the sectors and communities, the AEU believes there is little evidence to support the ‘development of a generalised ECD workforce or a pool of specialised integrated service managers’. As discussed above, the evidence strongly indicates that effective ECE must be taught by fully qualified four year tertiary trained ECE teachers. Professionals in the areas of health and other early childhood support services must also be appropriately qualified in their fields, with appropriate levels of expertise or specialisation in the ECE field. The integrated service models in the ACT, SA and WA are effective because they provide a range of services delivered by fully qualified professionals in their respective areas, and a hybrid early childhood qualification would undermine the integrity and quality of such integrated service delivery.

The AEU interprets the question of the involvement of multiple unions and professional associations in the context of increasing integration of ECD services in the sector as politically loaded and inappropriate. Unions have played important and innovative roles in driving reform in the sector. The AEU, for example, has had a long standing campaign for public universal provision of ECE in Australia, which it has prosecuted since the mid-1990s and will continue to do so, consistent with our rules and policy objectives.

Whilst the current and future demands of the ECD workforce will be predicated upon the rollout of universal provision of ECE in the year before school for fifteen hours a week, the AEU for some time has advocated for universal provision in the two years before school for twenty hours a week, in accordance with the evidence that such provision would maximise children’s long term opportunities for educational and life achievement. The AEU believes such provision should be the aim of all governments in the longer term, and that long term workforce planning should reflect this.

b. Market requirements for broader leadership, management and administrative skills in operating both mainstream universal service providers and integrated service hubs;

The AEU rejects the notion that market requirements are the primary ‘driver’ of ECD provision, including ‘market requirements for broader leadership, management and administrative skills’.

Governments at all levels have a responsibility to ensure that all children in Australia have an equal right to high quality ECE regardless of the market viability of delivery in particular settings. This includes a responsibility to ensure that there are appropriate budget provisions for the salaries and conditions which encourage dedicated professionals to enter and remain in the public ECE and ECD workforces. In this regard the AEU believes quality of provision is underpinned by high quality working conditions appropriate to different settings and locations.

Rather than being determined by the market, provision of appropriate leadership, management and administrative skills should be a responsibility of governments at all levels and underpinned by a commitment to universal provision in a manner aimed at supporting equality of outcomes. Investment in quality public Early Childhood Education reaps significant long term benefits for children, their families and the community.

To ensure that quality leadership is provided, there is strong evidence that qualifications for managers of ECE centres, whether integrated or otherwise, must be appropriate and based upon a relevant ECE qualification which incorporates essential knowledge of, and experience in, ECE pedagogy. These requirements increase the quality of ECE delivery by supporting professionalism. Building career paths for ECE teachers encourages them to remain in the profession.

c. The availability and quality of pre-service education programs, including through undergraduate and postgraduate education and VET, and consideration of training pathways;

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?

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

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

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

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

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?

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

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?

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?

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

The expansion of ECE and ECD in accordance with the goals of the Early Childhood NPA as well as the increasing emphasis on quality ECE to support child development and education will require a significant increase in the ECE workforce. This presents both a challenge, in that serious issues of attraction and retention of ECE teachers and ECD workers must be addressed, and an opportunity in that it provides the scope to ensure Australian children are taught by a professionally educated quality ECE teaching workforce into the future. Moves towards building

the ECE workforce must be accompanied by appropriate measures to ensure quality and professionalism. Foremost in this process is ensuring the quality of pre-service ECE courses.

As discussed, the AEU supports pre-service qualifications that are the equivalent of four years of tertiary education, inclusive of any recognition of prior learning, which qualify teachers to teach children in the 0-8 age range.

It is important that all institutions offering ECE degrees should graduate four year trained teachers. The AEU is aware that in Victoria, for example, there are a small number of universities which still offer a 3 year degree qualification in ECE teaching. Students who graduate with a three year degree are set behind others on the salary scale, and are limited in their career options.

To ensure equivalent professionalism of the ECE teaching workforce to other components of the teaching workforce, pre-service ECE courses should meet criteria equivalent to other teacher education courses. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is undertaking the development of a national system for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs. This included a consultation process during late 2010, with standards expected to be finalised during 2011 and transition to the national system during 2011 to 2012. Amongst the most significant parts of the Standards are a requirement for a minimum four year full-time (or equivalent) higher education qualification, high entry standards to courses and a requirement that professional knowledge of graduates include an understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and people.

The AEU believes the establishment of a nationally consistent system for the accreditation of initial teacher education courses is a positive initiative, with the potential to enhance the quality of pre-service teacher education and the classroom readiness of graduate teachers, including ECE teachers. Effective initial teacher education for all teachers should contain an appropriate balance of academic preparation, practicum across a variety of settings and age groups and experience to ensure that graduate teachers develop deep knowledge and understanding of subject content, professional issues and professional experience in preschools. The AEU also supports high minimum standards for entry into teacher education courses.

It is envisaged that the system will eventually be comprehensive of all ECE, primary and secondary courses. The AEU strongly supports the inclusion of ECE pre-service teacher education in a nationally consistent pre-service accreditation process and believes a concrete timeline should be established.

The new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), will guide the implementation and management of the integrated national regulatory system from 1 January 2012. Its remit includes ensuring consistency in the application and enforcement of the standards and rating levels for early childhood services, driving continuous improvement among services and advising the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) on the National Quality Framework. ACECQA must liaise with AITSL given there may be overlap in the responsibilities of the two bodies. Work in this area includes appropriate mutual recognition of nationally consistent teacher education courses, qualifications and teacher registration processes.

The AEU is aware that some universities in Victoria are presently subcontracting aspects of their teaching to private RTOs. Evidence demonstrates that subcontracting to an RTO in this manner is not an effective pathway to ensuring high and consistent standards, and the AEU believes that it should not take place.

The evidence demonstrates that there are significant obstacles to attracting and retaining both ECE teachers and childcare professionals to the industry. DEEWR commissioned research by Louise Watson notes that there are many barriers to completion of studies at both the Degree and Diploma levels. As many employers do not release staff to attend studies during work hours, the burden of studies falls on students during weeknights and weekends, which often conflicts with family responsibilities. The cost of studies was also identified as a barrier.²⁰

In the broader context, the OECD has noted that opportunities and pathways to further qualifications are often uneven, with staff at the lowest levels of initial training and pay having the least access to further education and professional development. Low pay, poor conditions as well as limited access to further learning and career pathways were also cited as disincentives to

²⁰ Watson, Op Cit, p. 35.

enter the ECD workforce.²¹ Lack of effective pathways to qualifications and incentives to further study will inevitably impact upon the ability to meet the increased demand for employment across the sector.

Additional strategies are needed to attract potential recruits to Diploma and Degree studies in the ECD area as well as target the existing ECD workforce to upgrade their qualifications. Given the complexity of the issues facing the potential workforce, these strategies must offer programs that contain flexibility without compromising quality. This may include programs to target women and men outside the workforce and utilise VET in schools as a potential pathway to diploma qualifications in the industry.

The Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy includes the removal of TAFE fees for child care diplomas and advanced diplomas, resourcing for additional early childhood education university places and HECS-HELP Benefit for early childhood education teachers working in areas of high disadvantage.²² Whilst the AEU supports these measures, it is unlikely they will be sufficient to meet the requirements of the expanding ECD workforce. Additional proactive measures must be put in place to attract and retain all workers in the sector, including ECE teachers. This includes improving salaries, conditions and access to career paths which all impact upon the attraction and retention of professionals in the sector. These matters are discussed in more detail under term of reference 2.

Appropriate strategies must be put in place to support existing childcare workers to become qualified ECE teachers. As the cost of study is often cited by workers as a barrier to undertaking further studies in ECE²³, government supported workforce strategies must include broader fee help to support workers to access higher level qualifications. Paid time release from the workplace and backfilling of workers released to study must also be provided and applied equitably across different settings.

²¹ OECD (2001) *Starting Strong. Early Childhood Education and Care*, pp.96-108. Quoted in Watson, Op Cit, p. 5.

²² Office of Early Childhood. HECS-HELP Benefit for early childhood education teachers.
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/EarlyChildhoodWorkforce/Pages/HECSHELPbenefit.aspx

²³ Watson, Op Cit, p. 35.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) must also be applied appropriately to support the up-skilling process. Whilst the AEU supports the appropriate application of RPL, we do not support RPL programs that damage the quality of pre-service ECE courses or undermine the integrity of ECE qualifications. Research clearly indicates the dangers of the inappropriate application of RPL.²⁴ It is important that RPL processes meet the high standards equivalent to the study which they replace. At present granting of RPL or recognition of VET qualifications is at the discretion of the institution and the evidence indicates that it varies considerably across the country.²⁵ Researchers note that the onus to obtain RPL rests heavily on the individual student, and thus may disadvantage students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.²⁶ Processes must be made clear and transparent, and proactive methods put into place to ensure that workers who may benefit from such processes are aware of them.

The AEU supports the provision of measures to enable equitable access for all workers who wish to upgrade their qualifications including women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, workers with disabilities and workers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Specific structures and strategies should be put into place to support these groups to upgrade their qualifications, including, where appropriate measures to support English academic literacy.

There are a number of best practice delivery models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which may be drawn on and applied to order to attract larger numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into ECD teaching. This includes the potential to expand the successful RATEP²⁷ model into the Early Childhood Education sector. The model was developed through a tripartite structure involving Education Queensland, Tropical North Queensland TAFE and James Cook University to deliver dual VET University pathways in to primary teaching qualifications. The program historically targeted students in remote areas using a variety of technologies to deliver education in their home communities. It has since been expanded to other non-remote Aboriginal communities. Macquarie University has also developed a successful model to support the upgrading of qualifications for Aboriginal and

²⁴ Price, & A, Jackson-Barrett, E. (2009). Developing an Early Childhood Teacher Workforce Development Strategy for Rural and Remote Communities. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 34, 6, pp. 41-51.

²⁵ Watson, Op Cit, p.15.

²⁶ Watson, Op Cit, p.15.

²⁷ Education Queensland. RATEP. <http://www.learningplace.com.au/defaultqa2.asp?orgid=89&suborgid=586>

Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education and Care teachers and workers, which is based on block-release delivery. Both models have produced successful outcomes through innovative delivery structures. Measures such as fully funded scholarships must also be implemented.

The AEU believes that all teachers employed in the public education system in Australia should complete a comprehensive sequence of Indigenous studies as a minimum requirement for their employment. To be a teacher in contemporary Australia, one must know about Indigenous students, their communities, their needs, their heritage, appropriate pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of Indigenous students and their communities. The AEU believes that Indigenous studies should be a mandatory component of any teaching qualification, including ECE.

Regulatory arrangements should ensure that educators working within and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and children provide appropriate in-service programs for all staff on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, cultural diversity, histories, pedagogies and the like.

All pre-service teacher education courses must include significant units on teaching students with special needs and those from CALD backgrounds and those from lower SES backgrounds.

d. ECD workforce participation, including ease of access to the early childhood development workforce in different sectors and net returns to individuals and recognition of expertise;

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?

Workforce participation is impacted by salaries, career paths and other employment and social conditions which relate to the attraction and retention of workers in the sector. It is important that salaries and career paths should be equivalent to other teachers, and salaries and conditions of childcare workers and other workers in the sector be comparable with others working with similar levels of qualifications. These matters are further addressed under term of reference 2.

Due to differing economic circumstances around Australia, issues relating to working conditions vary in particular regions. The resources boom in Western Australia, for example, has brought with it high rental and living costs. High salaries offered to workers in the mining industry in these regions impact greatly on the retention of staff. Additional incentives may be required under such circumstances to attract and retain workers in the sector.

In rural and remote areas, access to teacher accommodation is another issue which impacts on the ability to attract and retain staff. Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the AEU report difficulties in accessing teacher accommodation if they are living and working in their home communities due to state and territory education department regulations. This has a particular impact on Indigenous local recruits, as overcrowding in remote area housing makes it difficult for teachers to find a quiet space to plan and prepare work. The AEU is aware of a number of Indigenous teachers, trained specifically to work in their home communities, who have left their communities to work in other areas due to this issue. Specific strategies should be developed by governments at all levels to address these issues.

e. The quality and skills of the workforce, job design and workplace practices and arrangements and their contribution to achieving COAG outcomes and setting future direction.

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

The AEU believes that state, territory and federal governments will need to invest substantially in order to ensure the COAG targets are met. The OECD *Education at a Glance* report, 2010, states that Australia spends only 0.1% of GDP on ECEC, compared to the OECD average of 0.5%.²⁸

Issues related to the importance of appropriate qualifications have been discussed in term of reference 1.c.

A number of AEU members in the ECE sector are experienced teachers with three year degree qualifications who are close to retirement. Given the vast experience of many of these teachers, the AEU supports appropriate ‘grand-parenting’ or ‘deeming’ strategies to be developed and applied in consultation and negotiation with the union, rather than a uniform application of the four-year degree qualified regulation. This in no way should diminish the AEU’s support for the application of the four year degree qualification for all ECE teachers, as agreed by COAG.

Additional support is required for children with special needs, including access to specialised integrated professional services; professional support staff; appropriately trained teachers, teachers aides/assistants; and ongoing professional development. Specific strategies must be included in all workforce education and training programs (pre-service and in-service) to ensure the training of specialist teachers and assistants/aides. In addition to the training of specialist workers, all workers in the sector must have appropriate training and support to meet the requirements of children with special needs.

²⁸ OECD, (2010) *Education at a Glance*, Table B2.2, p. 218.

A consistent national definition of students with a disability is essential and the AEU welcomes moves by MCEECDYA to progress this work.

The AEU supports the fundamental requirements of the National Quality Standard, including the requirements for all providers to meet the standards as a pre-condition for registration. The development and implementation of the new regulatory framework must be accompanied by provision for relevant professional development across sectors to ensure workers are familiar with it and to their professional obligations under it.

Appropriate staff/child ratios are essential to quality delivery of ECE. The AEU believes an appropriate national standard is 2:20 for all preschool education programs. Where preschools offer programs for 3 year olds, the minimum national standard for staff /child ratios must be 2:15, comprising one qualified early childhood teacher and one aide/assistant. Where the minimum staff/child ratio comprises one qualified early childhood teacher and one assistant, group sizes for programs for 4 year olds must be restricted to a maximum of 20. It is essential that group sizes and staff/child ratios are adjusted to meet the needs of children with additional or special needs. National standards should include these conditions and workforce planning should take these issues into account.

There is strong evidence demonstrating that the quality of education provided by teachers is most effective when ongoing professional development is systematic, well-resourced and high quality. Andreas Schleicher of the Directorate of Education at the OECD, for example, notes that the best performing countries in PISA “build their success on combining clear and ambitious standards for educational performance with access to best practice and professional development and support”.²⁹ Effective professional development is also important in supporting career pathways for teachers.

The AEU supports a collegial approach to improvement which encourages teachers to support each other and work together to improve their professional capabilities. Such professional development should draw on the professional expertise of teachers rather than impose template ‘standards’ that have been determined elsewhere.

²⁹ Schleicher, A (2008) *Seeing School Systems Through the Prism of PISA*. Commissioned paper in Appendix A, Luke, et al, Op Cit. p.75

Professional development should address the requirements of teachers and workers in a range of settings. Teachers in remote settings in particular face issues and obstacles to their participation in professional development and communication with colleagues in the wider teaching community. Strategies to address these issues include time release, access to appropriate IT facilities and travel allowances to allow teachers to attend professional development activities.

2. Workforce planning, development and structure in the short, medium and long term, covering:

- a. Career pathways, the structure of existing employment arrangements and practices and the extent to which they are dis/incentives to attracting and retaining employees, including pay and conditions across settings; strategies to address possible pay equity issues as necessary; options for funding pay increases as necessary; and the implications for purchasers of ECD services and all levels of government and funding responsibilities;**

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?

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?

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

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?

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?

There is a broad range of research which identifies the barriers to supporting and developing a professional workforce in the sector and thus would contribute to the achievement of the COAG targets. The OECD found that workers in the sector in Australia are amongst the lowest paid and least qualified in the countries studied.³⁰ Watson³¹ found that poor conditions, including low wages and limited access to further learning and career pathways are disincentives to recruitment and retention of the ECD workforce. Respondents to the National Children's Services Workforce Study, published in 2004, identified higher wages, pay for training and raising the profile and status of workers in the sector as the most effective strategies for retaining workers and combating the high 'burnout' rate.³²

The Early Childhood Education sector in Australia is predominantly staffed by women. The AEU believes that appropriate recognition and remuneration for the work of early childhood teachers and other education professionals is paramount to improving retention in the industry and access to higher level career paths. Parity of salary and conditions to the primary teaching scale in each state and territory would be a positive strategy in closing the gender pay gap in Australia. This is particularly important in attracting early childhood teachers into long day care settings. Currently it is common for them to receive lower wages and lesser conditions which, in concert with employment structures, act as a disincentive to work in the early childhood education sector.

The AEU supports moves for greater workplace flexibility, including the application of strategies, where appropriate, such as job-sharing, part-time work and paid maternity leave. However, we do not believe that the implementation of these strategies should impinge on workers' rights to job security and thus we are strongly opposed to the trend of increased casualisation and other forms of precarious employment. Systemic employment of teachers and assistants by State and Territory departments of education rather than the piecemeal or patchwork nature of employment in states such as Victoria can act as a buffer against casualisation and under-employment (as may result from fluctuating birth rates etc) which impact

³⁰ OECD (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*.
http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3343,en_2649_39263231_37416703_1_1_1_1,00.html

³¹ Watson, Op Cit, p. 48.

³² Community Services Ministers Advisory Council (2006). *National Children's Services Workforce Study*, p.6.

on enrolments, whilst at the same time facilitating the capacity of services to meet changing service demands and needs.

Whilst the status of the ECE profession is vital to ensuring the stability of the workforce, the importance of ECE and the status of ECE teachers is arguably not fully understood in the wider community or by decision makers. Whilst we strongly support links with the primary years of schooling, it is also true that the nature of ECE and play based learning is not always well understood in primary settings, and there can be pressure to push the primary curriculum into the pre-school years.

The AEU believes state, territory and federal governments should work with teacher unions, teacher professional associations and other relevant stakeholders to promote understanding about the importance of ECE in the community and campaign for the recognition of ECE and an understanding of the vital and unique role of ECE teachers. Promotion of ECE as a profession is presently being undertaken by some state departments and may serve as models for campaigns elsewhere. Such campaigns should include efforts to ensure that the unique nature of ECE pedagogy is understood in the broader community and in primary schools, particularly by principals, leaders, and officials in state and territory departments. In improving the status of ECE teachers in the community these campaigns are likely to encourage more people to choose ECE as a career.

Establishing effective career paths should be a major element of workforce planning and proactive strategies will need to be employed to ensure workers have access to effective career paths across the range of settings in which ECD is provided. Employment structures should support consistency of terms and conditions and portability of entitlements (long service leave, sick leave etc) which is not currently the case in all states and territories. Where ECE provision is co-located with primary schools or linked to the early years of schooling, ECE teachers should have access to the same or equivalent career paths as other teachers, including becoming principals or vice principals. This already occurs in pre-schools attached to NSW government primary schools. In other settings, career paths should also be linked to centre leadership positions. As discussed in term of reference 1.b, the AEU believes that qualifications for managers of ECE centres whether integrated or otherwise, must be appropriate and based upon a relevant ECE qualification. As indicated above, systemic employment structures enhance such

opportunities. Appropriate professional development and support structures should be available in all settings. In a 2010 survey, conducted by the AEU Victorian Branch,³³ of 88 Victorian pre-service teachers (completing early childhood/primary qualifications), 65% of respondents said that support structures would heavily influence their decision about where to seek work. It was the view of many students that a school setting would offer greater opportunities for support:

I am looking for a career (not just a job) that will support me in my professional development and mentor me through my first few years. I do not believe community based kindergartens or preschools offer this to graduates. Therefore, I am more inclined to look for employment in a primary school.

There are a number of other multi-disciplinary contexts and settings in which ECE teachers are employed, including in early intervention programs, and as pre-school field officers. The salaries and conditions that these teachers are employed under should be included in the context of this study in efforts to ensure equivalence of salaries, conditions and career paths.

Consideration must also be given to the issue of under-employment (insufficient hours) resulting from small populations. Systems which support options for cross-sectoral employment, for example EC/Primary, as well as across the pre-compulsory years, will provide greater opportunity. Similarly, attraction and retention of staff may also be impacted upon by hours of employment resulting from fluctuations in the birthrate and resultant ECE enrolments. These must be dealt with by long term workforce planning projections and processes.

b. Potential labour market failures;

The potential for labour market failure is real, especially in light of COAG's ECD goals. Even before these goals, the National Children's Services Workforce Study, published in 2006, estimated a shortfall in staff in the sector of 7,320 by 2013.³⁴ Nationally 32% of early childhood educators left their positions in 2004 alone, and that figure was higher for unqualified staff.³⁵ Furthermore, in 2008 30% of early childhood teachers in Victoria were aged 50 or above³⁶, a figure likely to be similar in other jurisdictions.

³³ AEU, Victoria, (2010). *AEU survey of Victorian pre-service early childhood teachers 2010*. Unpublished survey.

³⁴ Community Services Ministers Advisory Council (2006). *Op Cit*, p.5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.48.

³⁶ Unpublished DEECD data. Quoted in, DEECD (2009). *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce*, p. 15. <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/ecworkforce.pdf>.

Whilst issues of low salaries, poor conditions, poor career paths and lack of assistance with further study have been discussed elsewhere in this submission, the new qualifications requirements of the COAG National Quality Framework³⁷ make these issues particularly pertinent in the context of labour market stability. Unless these issues are addressed it will remain difficult to attract people to the ECD sector, labour market failure will remain a risk, and the goals of the COAG reform agenda will be less likely to succeed. What must be avoided is a low skills low pay pathway in the ECD care workforce that entrenches poor salaries and conditions and leads to a high overturn of labour and a consequent lowering of the quality of ECD services.³⁸

NCVER research identifies four basic principles which contribute to a high-skilled staff with lower rates of turnover:

- Staff are offered permanent employment;
- Higher staff–child ratios than required by the statutory minima are adopted;
- The philosophy behind early childhood education and care is explained to staff and practised in the workplace;
- Employer-supported skill development is geared towards formal skills acquisition and higher learning.³⁹

This position is also supported by the OECD. Starting Strong II states:

Attention to the level of recruitment of early childhood workers, their professional education and work conditions is key to quality services. In several countries, such attention is also critical for workforce development and the long-term sustainability of recruitment into early childhood services.⁴⁰

The goals of improving the remuneration, conditions, status and career paths and educational opportunities of the ECD workforce must be strongly supported by governments in a proactive manner if workforce stability in the sector is to be achieved and the objectives of the COAG

³⁷ COAG (2010). Op Cit, p. 3.

³⁸ Bretherton, T (2010). *Workforce development in early childhood education and care: Research overview*. p.1..<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2260.html>

³⁹ Ibid, p.2.

⁴⁰ Starting Strong II, Op Cit, Exec Summary p. 17.

agenda in ECD accomplished. These workforce goals are not compatible with for profit provision. Furthermore, there is a strong evidence base that these goals are best facilitated through public provision, as discussed in more detail in the following section.

c. The impact of government, community and private provision;

There is a growing body of research internationally and within Australia which questions the notion that ‘opening up’ the ECD market has led to improved quality, and argues that ‘quality childcare and the pursuit of profits are incompatible goals’.⁴¹ In a policy environment which advocates the importance of evidence-based reform, the AEU believes that the collapse of ABC Learning provides a salient lesson to governments about the need for better regulation of the sector. Thus, the AEU strongly supports moves by COAG to align the National Quality Framework with the Regulatory environment which we assume will enable governments to better manage the risks associated with private provision.

ABC Learning had a comprehensive strategy for lowering costs and maximising profits⁴², which eventually impacted on certainty of provision. This strategy involved keeping labour costs low through:

- High occupancy rates;
- High child to staff ratios;
- Centralising functions such as standardising curriculum development, recruitment and training of staff, coordination of menus and interior design; and
- The provision of playground material through the exclusive provision of a company which ABC Learning once owned.⁴³

Marketisation of the industry in Australia has not led to higher quality or greater affordability. It has not led to higher standards, better qualified staff, or improved working conditions. Evidence suggests the opposite is the case.

⁴¹ Harris, N (2008) Women’s Reflections on choosing quality long day care in a regional community. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*.
http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/australian_journal_of_early_childhood/ajec_index_abstracts/womens_reflections_on_choosing_quality_long_day_care_in_a_regional_community.html

⁴² Brown, T. (2008) Easy as ABC? Learning to Organise Private Child Care Workers. *Labour Studies Journal* 2009. <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/handle/10453/10006>

⁴³ Ibid.

The AEU believes that all children have the right to access high quality ECE and that this right contributes to the public good. This position is supported by the Senate Inquiry in to the Provision of Childcare:

A range of witnesses indicated to the committee that the childcare sector has come to be seen as an industry and childcare as a commodity, where parents are consumers and the market controls price and distribution. This approach takes little heed of children's needs and in fact views children as products or units of revenue production. ABC Learning's business model has been described as 'care is a commodity rather than community service'. In contrast, school education has long been regarded as a 'public good'. Knowledge and skills are basic to the building and maintenance of any society. It follows that as scientific research has established the crucial role of early childhood learning in social and cognitive development, provision of appropriate learning opportunities for children from the earliest age is also a public good.⁴⁴

The recent *Network of experts in Social Sciences of Education* (NESSE) report which reviewed international research across a number of countries for the European Commission found that:

Private for profit ECEC services are variable but tend to offer the lowest quality services in all countries where they have been investigated. Private for profit provision may exacerbate social stratification.⁴⁵

The circumstances of ECD in Australia at present can be understood in the context of the decision by the federal Labor government in 1990 to extend fee relief to users of private for-profit care providers. Services were required from 1994 to participate in a system of accreditation established by the commonwealth. In 2000, the Howard government instituted the Child Care Benefit (CCB).

Successive federal government policies, designed to reduce the costs of using approved child care, whether public, community or private, have in fact resulted had the opposite effect – a steady rise in costs. Newberry et al states that:

⁴⁴ Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee, Op Cit, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Penn, H and NESSE Network of Experts, (2009). *Early Childhood Education and Care Key Lessons from Research for Policy Makers. An independent report submitted to the European Commission by the NESSE networks of experts*, p.7. <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/ecec-report-pdf>

Increasing the level of user subsidies has a short-term effect on reducing parents' out of pocket expenses. However, it seems clear that such subsidies are also implicated in a cost spiral where greater government assistance is quickly absorbed into service price rises.⁴⁶

Newberry et al also notes that a shortcoming of demand-side subsidy funding is that it tends to result in fluctuating enrolments and, therefore, fluctuating funding for childcare centres. They also note that there is evidence that demand-side subsidy funding may pose a threat to the quality of services delivered:

Research associates demand side policies with less efficacious external regulation and monitoring of ECEC. With parents unable to see for themselves the services provided, corporate providers focused on increasing returns to shareholders, have incentives to claim high quality services rather than actually to provide high quality.⁴⁷

Watson also demonstrates that the percentage of qualified childcare staff in childcare centres is considerably lower than in pre-schools and schools⁴⁸ and that significant disparities exist between wages and working conditions of early childhood workers and those working in the education sector's schools and pre-schools.⁴⁹

Public provision of ECE is more likely to provide stability in the teaching workforce, with more consistent pay, conditions and career structures and more consistent professional development and teacher capacity building. It is also more likely to provide ease of access with the early years of schooling, more direct support from state and territory education departments, more effective provision to rural and remote areas and more equity of access. Strong links to the early years of schooling through public provision also facilitate more flexible career paths with opportunities for 0-8 qualified teachers to move between ECE and primary, as well as opportunities for ECE teachers to take up leadership positions in schools. Moreover, research indicates that disadvantaged children benefit more if they attend centres which have a mix of children from different social backgrounds.⁵⁰ This is more likely to be the case where provision is public.

⁴⁶ Newberry, S and Brennan, D (2008). *Economic and Social Policy Tensions: Early Childhood Education and Care in a Marketised Environment*, Submission to the Senate Inquiry in to Child Care, p.5.
<https://senate.aph.gov.au/submissions/committees/viewdocument.aspx?id=c87002fe-90e8-4296-aaa8-93efd2c6ceaa>

⁴⁷ Newberry, et al, op cit, p.13.

⁴⁸ Watson, Op Cit, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Sylva K, et al, Op Cit.

Examples of successful public provision of ECE exist in a number of jurisdictions in Australia. As discussed in term of reference 1.a, the ACT, South Australia and Western Australia contain developed systems of public ECE provision linked with the early years of schooling and delivered through integrated service models. These form examples of the effective delivery of ECE through public provision which the AEU hopes may be emulated in other jurisdictions in the future.

d. The concept and workforce implications of integrated service delivery.

Issues concerning the concept and workforce implications of integrated service delivery have already been discussed in term of reference 1. The AEU believes integrated delivery should be supported by quality ECE provision, including a fully qualified four year tertiary educated ECE workforce covering the years 0-8.

Leadership in the early years is essential to provide effective and appropriate professional development for ECE teachers and teacher capacity building. Integrated services should contain Early Years leadership programs which are embedded in to organisational structures to provide pathways for teachers to take on leadership roles. The AEU believes that where ECE services are integrated with schools, dedicated ECE leadership positions should be an integral part of the school and early years leadership structures.

Whilst strongly supporting links between ECE and the early years of schooling the AEU believes it is essential that the nature of ECE play based learning be understood and recognised by schools and the community.