

Response:

On behalf of CAWA we have provided short notes in response to some of the questions raised in the paper that represent the view of our members some of which were also discussed in person with the Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner whilst in Perth in December 2010.

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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?

The list does cover the range of childcare settings. I do note the comment about many day care centres now providing preschool programs – I don't believe this is the majority.

The list of occupations is relevant.

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?

The overwhelming response we get from members about the current workforce is the following points

- Very young girls with very low literacy and comprehension skills that see the “path” of childcare as an easy one and it also gives them the step into the tertiary system by commencing a certificate II in Childcare and then going onto complete other qualifications.
- High turnover of staff in regional mining towns – the wage of a childcare worker is no comparison to menial task jobs such as stacking shelves or pumping fuel in these towns.
- Diploma and Certificate III graduates require a higher pay to acknowledge the training – however the graduates are not able to display basic literacy levels to allow them to complete report writing, child profiles and compliance paperwork required. (spelling is atrocious)
- The above point we believe is resulting from TAFE taking away the minimum requirements of completing year 12 high school with a pass in English as a entry requirement.
- Members are reporting constant recruiting is a very real part of running a centre.

- Working conditions – these vary across the state with private, non-for profit and centres with private agreements with their staff.

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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?

The workforce in the centres that provides care to children with additional needs is one of 2 generally;

- Older ladies with certificates in either
 - childcare
 - aged care
 - Disabilities
- Younger girls are being put in these roles due to the low ISS rate being offered to subsidise the wage for an additional worker.

Positions are normally casual or part – time to work in with the child’s needs, it is increasingly more difficult to recruit part – time educators to work the hours the child needs.

Members have reported not being able to provide care for a family with a child with additional needs due to not being able to recruit a suitable educator.

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

I note that you report about 60% use formal childcare for the benefit of their child and not just workforce participation – this is a figure that could be greatly increased

Some of the positive child development reasons that families use ECEC services are as listed;

- Positive child relationships
- Positive child/educator relationships
- Positive parent support
- Development of social skills
- Speech development
- Motor development
- Sensory development
- Preparation for Kindy /school

The list of positive outcomes for a child participating regularly in a child care program is very long and I have just mentioned some of the key points.

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?

CAWA contends that the female labour force participation is strongly influenced by the availability of quality formal child care.

Members report that mothers returning to work after the birth of their child are simply in a place of no child care – means no work or to place the child with relatives (often not the first choice).

CAWA member history would confirm an increase of females entering the workforce would directly correlate to an increase in demand for childcare places.

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

I would certainly put forward the view of members reporting that the increasing rises in costs associated with operating a service are resulting in an increase in child care costs, this in turn at times limits the options a family have when choosing a centre with higher fees. We have members reporting that when a young family completes their budget with childcare fees included the return to work is quite often not viable for the family.

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

Whilst the proposed qualification standards seek to improve the delivery of care for children, the reality is that the new standards will have a big impact on the need for more suitably trained staff to meet the requirements – this I believe will make the recruitment process harder as services look for the suitable trained staff.

There is immense concern from members in rural WA who at present find it very difficult to meet the current standards with a Diploma trained qualified as there are none to recruit – these members are voicing their concern at attracting a university trained Educator to their rural centre. There is genuine concern that their service may be forced to close if they can't meet the minimum requirements.

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

AS discussed with the Commissioners in Perth – CAWA suggestion is to have a Government wage rebate system for employers based on the level of Qualifications held in a service – this would decrease the costs passed onto then families. This would also possibly result in employers being encouraged to employ a higher skilled workforce.

An example of this could be a \$ figure per hour dependant on the qualification – i.e. more for a University graduate employed on the team.

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?

We are unable to comment on all of Australia, but from comments from our members in WA particularly in Rural & Remote areas' finding suitable qualified staff is very difficult, many of our members in the Metropolitan areas also have reported this as a very big issue.

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?

Wages and wage differentials are relevant, but not seen as a major factor, in Rural and Remote WA the cost of living higher, in mining towns accommodation is extremely hard to find and rent is astronomical. Many centres offer above award conditions and pay, extra holidays, training etc...

Does the regulatory burden have a significant impact on attracting or retaining staff in the ECD sector?

Yes. In many instances, staff is not adequately equipped to deal with the expected reporting and recording that is a regulatory expectation.