

Submission to the Productivity Commission: Early Childhood Development Workforce Study, February 2011

Child Australia appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important study which seeks to guide the development of the Early Childhood Development workforce into the future.

Child Australia is a diverse organisation with a long history of supporting the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. Since 2005 we have delivered professional support to the sector through the DEEWR funded Inclusion and Professional Support Program. Within that program, Child Australia fulfils the function of Professional Support Coordinator in Western Australia (PSCWA) and the Northern Territory (PSCNT) and manages 6 of the 8 Inclusion Support Agencies in Western Australia. The PSC and ISA programs are funded to support Australian Government Approved Child Care Services (AGACCS).

In addition to these large and wide reaching programs, Child Australia runs a number of smaller programs in Western Australia aimed at supporting the sector and has recently moved into the direct service delivery with the opening of the Child Early Learning Centre Lockridge.

It is the knowledge of the sector this organisation has through the delivery of these programs, coupled with the expertise that exists within Child Australia that places us well to provide a valuable contribution to this discussion in relation to the Early Education and Care sector. This submission will comment specifically on issues we view as critical to the further development of a robust ECEC sector as well as highlight specific challenges that exist for ECEC services in our jurisdictions, most notably the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory context

The ECEC sector workforce in the NT is challenged in terms of quality and stability with pockets of good practice. It is not reflective of other jurisdictions in Australia in terms of minimum standards of care. This is evident in Darwin, the regional centres and certainly in remote areas of the Territory. In general, the ECEC workforce in the NT is under-skilled, undertrained, underpaid (relative to costs of living) and highly transient. This gives extreme cause for concern about the implications of the National Quality Agenda for the sector in the NT and how the NT ECEC sector can work towards the quality objectives, when in many cases, the basics of quality care are absent, as is the knowledge of what quality looks like in ECEC.

The Western Australian context

The Western Australian context is more diverse with marked variation between metropolitan and regional/rural and remote locations. The workforce in north-west rural and remote

locations aligns with the NT with high turnover, transience, and a relatively low qualification base. There are a limited number of experienced staff, particularly in the north-west (NW) of the state, to be effective workforce mentors. The tightening labour market, driven by the buoyancy of the resource sector, is again negatively impacting on the ECEC sector. The earnings disparity between resource sector/resource related industries and the ECEC sector, coupled with escalating NW living costs are key drivers in workforce turnover in NW regional WA.

Metropolitan WA presents a different picture with a more qualified and skilled workforce more able to deliver the reform agenda.

Responses to questions raised in the Issues Paper

Question	Comments and possible actions
<p><i>Future demand for ECD workers</i> <i>What effect will the new standards and targets have on demand for ECD workers?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is little doubt that the demand for qualified educators will significantly increase across the ECEC sector, particularly where there are services operating with few or no qualified staff. This will put pressure on existing workers to upgrade or obtain a qualification.• A targeted strategy for the ECEC sector with improved training funding models is necessary to support workers and services in meeting the new requirements for the sector to grow in capacity and capability.
<p><i>Supply of ECD workers</i> <i>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?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ECEC sector is challenged attracting staff and this is expected to intensify with the implementation of the NQF. Whilst there is complete support for the NQF, we have concerns about the impact of qualification standards on the supply of childcare staff (educators) in a sector already experiencing low qualification rates and high turnover. This is particularly salient in the Northern Territory.• The Northern Territory has an extreme skill shortage in the ECEC sector. The population in the Territory is younger (average age 31.2 years according to ABS data), more transient than in other jurisdictions and the high cost of living reduces the attractiveness of relatively low paid work.• The Northern Territory is also short of teaching staff for schools where conditions of employment are far superior to ECEC sector in terms of pay and conditions. There appears to be no clear strategy about how teachers will be attracted to the ECEC sector to provide pedagogical leadership if this disparity is not addressed.

Question

Comments and possible actions

- There is high turnover in a female dominated ECEC workforce. This gender imbalance results in a 'young' workforce and many educators leaving the workforce just as they gain the skills and experience for optimum performance. Many educators do not return to the workforce after periods of parental leave. This creates a cycle whereby capacity is consistently lost from the sector, and where the emphasis of training and development activities remains at a basic level.
 - New and innovative government funded strategies are required to attract staff to the sector and retain them. In particular, it is essential that leadership is developed in ECEC services to support the changes required in the NQF.
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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?

- Rates of pay for ECEC educators are not reflective of the important work they do and are amongst the lowest across all workforces. This impacts on attractiveness of the work, particularly in jurisdiction where the cost of living is high, such as the Northern Territory and north-west of Western Australia.
 - Community perceptions about the value of ECEC work is a key area that contributes to difficulty in attracting staff, particularly EC teachers who see working in this sector as less attractive than the school sector.
 - Pay and working hours/ holidays also impacts on this, as has been identified in the Issues Paper. In particular, shifts commencing as early as 6.30am, are unattractive given the associated rate of pay.
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Pay and conditions

What are the key factors influencing an

- ECEC educators tend to be attracted to the sector for one or more of the following reasons:
 - Easy to get employment
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Question

Comments and possible actions

individual's decision to work in the ECD sector?

- Don't need to be qualified to get a job
- Passionate about children (or think they are when entering the sector)
- Have own children and can do this work whilst caring for own children (family day care)
- Work with similar age colleagues

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?

- There is a direct link between professionalisation of the ECEC sector and wages paid. Community perceptions around childcare are poor and there is debate in the popular media around the benefits of childcare, particularly in comparison with care by primary caregiver. There is little linkage made to the outcomes and benefits for children in attending ECEC settings.
- There is limited community understanding of the importance of the early years of a child's life. Despite evidence from ongoing research, the wider community does not understand the vital link between early education and care, and longer term positive life outcomes. Educators are still largely perceived as “babysitters” who spend their days playing with children. The importance of high quality education and care remains poorly understood.
- The highly regulated nature of childcare makes it expensive. Services generally do not receive any financial support from the government in the running of the service with all financial support being paid to parents to mitigate high childcare costs. This directly impacts on wages paid to the sector.
- The first step in improving conditions for ECEC educators is to improve community perceptions about the value of childcare and build understanding about the educational benefits for children. A targeted media campaign by government is needed to educate the community about the important role that ECEC educators play. Recognition is the

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	<p>first step in professionalisation of the sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The marked difference in remuneration across child care and education means that degree trained early childhood teachers do not enter this part of the ECEC sector. The child care qualification base, as a result, remains depressed. To redress this imbalance, pay parity is required across the school and childcare/preschool jurisdictions. The costs of childcare/preschool education are not subsidised by the government in the same way as compulsory education. The result of requiring ECD services to be independently financially viable is downward pressure on wages.
<p><i>Qualifications and Career Pathways</i> <i>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?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We support the introduction of minimum Certificate III in Children's Services for ECEC workers as part of the NQA The focused nature of ECEC qualifications restricts workers from using these qualifications in other ECD sectors with the exception of teaching qualifications.
<p><i>Do newly-qualified ECD workers have the necessary skills and attributes to be effective in the workplace?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This greatly depends on the quality of their qualification. We seriously question the adequacy of the current VET training package to deliver the skills and attributes necessary for effective workplace participation, particularly given the dearth of workplace mentors. Qualifications gained by way of traineeships and or RPL/RCC processes for experience gained in the workplace are highly dependent on the quality of the workplace learning and the availability of workplace mentors and leaders. As a result, newly-qualified ECD workers may lack the skills and attributes to be effective in the workplace. They

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<i>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?</i>	<p data-bbox="846 276 2002 352">frequently also lack appropriate role models to help them cement their learning and grow their pedagogy.</p> <ul data-bbox="804 395 2002 1222" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="804 395 2002 555">• Child Australia is the Professional Support Coordinator for WA and NT. The PSC is funded by DEEWR to provide PD and support to AGACC ECEC services. Child Australia provides extensive PD opportunities throughout the WA and NT to meet the identified professional development and support needs of the sector. <li data-bbox="804 600 2002 842">• PSC PD is focused on skill enhancement and development to build capacity in the sector. In locations where qualifications and skills are low, it is challenging to provide this skill development and enhancement due to lack of basic understanding of child development and quality practices. Our training needs analyses have repeatedly demonstrated the need for basic/entry level skill and competency training across much of the NT <li data-bbox="804 887 2002 1222">• Child Australia (PSCNT & PSCWA) understands that there are barriers for regional and remote services in accessing PD and have developed ways for Educators to engage in PD including: <ul data-bbox="949 1018 1760 1222" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="949 1018 1361 1050">○ Online training opportunities <li data-bbox="949 1058 1671 1090">○ Child Times (4 times per year posted to all services) <li data-bbox="949 1098 1214 1129">○ Facebook pages <li data-bbox="949 1137 1760 1169">○ Regional and remote workshops and service consultancies <li data-bbox="949 1177 1460 1222">○ Customised workshop opportunities <p data-bbox="846 1230 2002 1305">A barrier that we have been unable to address relates to the inability of many ECD services to release staff during work hours as they do not have relief staff.</p>

Question	Comments and possible actions
<p><i>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?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, professional status is a factor for the ECEC workforce. See previous comments.
<p><i>Will the supply of qualified ECD workers expand sufficiently to meet COAG's objectives? How might the training of additional workers be funded?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an area for concern in jurisdictions already struggling to attract ECEC qualified staff and where there is attraction for qualified teachers to work in the school sector over poorer paid ECEC positions. • The critical shortage of ECEC leaders and mentors in the NT will negatively impact the growth of a skilled workforce. • Funding of additional qualified workers is essential to meet COAG's objectives. This will require a substantial injection of funding by the commonwealth and a commitment to examine the current VET sector delivery of ECEC qualifications, together with the ongoing capacity of the sector to support newly qualified workers. Additional and adequate levels of commonwealth funding directed at sustaining and growing leaders and mentors may assist by supporting newly qualified workers
<p><i>Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of ECEC qualifications, there is great variation in quality and depth of learning that occurs within a qualification. There is no nationally recognised minimum and maximum time allowable to obtain a VET qualification. This enable unscrupulous RTOs to deliver qualifications quickly (examples include students obtaining a Diploma in Children's Services in 12 weeks without any RPL). These cannot equip a student with the skills required to fulfil a qualified Educator role in an ECEC setting.

Question

Comments and possible actions

- In the Northern Territory there is a high number of Educators on SDPs. These workers have completed a Certificate III in Children's Services and have enrolled in the Diploma. It is common practice in this jurisdiction for Educators to be placed in qualified positions whilst studying towards the Diploma. It is also common practice that these Educators are not monitored for progress in their study and may not even be actively studying. This has led to a situation where many Educators believe that Certificate III attainment is equivalent to being a qualified ECEC worker.
- As well as having quality courses, it is essential that there is effective and skilled leadership in the services to mentor and support the learning needs of Educators. In the Northern Territory there is a lack of stable leadership in services which impacts heavily on the learning in the workplace.
- Training packages are not reflective of the new world created by the NQA. There needs to be a focus on this in order for educators to receive qualifications that are reflective of the NQF and EYLF.
- All ECEC trainers must have a developed understanding of NQF and the new learning frameworks (EYLF and FSAC) to deliver training and assessment services that meet the changing needs of the sector.

Areas requiring action

- All training packages need to be reviewed to align with EYLF and build knowledge around NQF.
- Minimum and standardised VET training requirements need to be enforced between the

Question	Comments and possible actions
	<p>states and territories. This is more important with the increase in online delivery of courses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater support incentives need to be provided for services to support their staff through study. • New and innovative ways to open up places for quality training opportunities should be developed eg. commonwealth funded regional mentoring positions. • ECEC trainers must have contemporary knowledge and skills, particularly in relation to NQF, EYLF and FSAC.
<p><i>What can be done to ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled trainers to meet future increases in demand for training?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainers require industry experience so there is a high likelihood of a skilled trainer shortage as there are already a leadership/skills and knowledge gap across the ECEC sector. Commonwealth may need to inject funding/subsidise employment to attract, develop and retain skilled ECEC trainers to meet the increased demand for training. This may require sourcing trainers and/or training providers external to NT (in the short term) to build the capacity of the NT training sector. • Concentrating training supply to a small number of providers might also work to build the trainer skill base as it would facilitate professional supervision and more rapidly progress “junior” trainers • The PSC program could be expanded to have a more explicit mentoring role however this would require adequate funding to be effective.

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<p>Workforce Planning</p> <p><i>Will the workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the ECD sector?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to predict what percentage of Educators will leave the sector although attrition is likely to depend upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ base skills level (literacy, numeracy, language barriers etc.) ○ the level of support they receive in the service to complete the training ○ the perceived benefits of upgrading skills (pay and conditions) ○ the perceived quality of training ○ their level of job satisfaction
<p>Integration of ECD Services</p> <p><i>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?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many core skills and competencies across the ECD workforce, not the least of which is the need for contemporary understanding of children’s learning and development. Research both in Australia and internationally evidences the value of integrated service delivery models for children and families. There is considerable scope to develop a more comprehensive and collaborative approach across the ECD workforce and the skill-mix requirements would greatly depend on the nature of services integrated. • We consider that neither current VET training nor ECD tertiary level studies adequately prepare managers for current responsibilities. Should services integrate or co-locate, the management requirements will be more complex and require more developed and wide ranging management skills that are not currently offered within the ECD context.
<p><i>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?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unions and professional associations represent the interests of their members. Whilst at times their involvement may appear to restrict innovation and/or flexibility, their actions are geared to ensuring no erosion of/loss of “benefits” to members. We consider that they are key stakeholders and critical to ensuring effective change across the sector. Should there be adequate member protection and clear career path

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<p><i>ECD workforce for Indigenous children</i> <i>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?</i></p>	<p>advantages, we believe that unions and professional associations will work to increase flexibility and support innovation. They need to be involved in sector consultation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential that all Educators are culturally competent. This is particularly important in the NW of WA and in the NT where there is a large Indigenous population. • Qualifications must incorporate units around cultural awareness as a minimum for effective engagement in multicultural contexts and these skills should be built by exposure to diverse populations.
<p><i>ECD Workforce for Children with Additional Needs</i> <i>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?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential that the ECD workforce understands how to include ALL children. There is prevalent yet mistaken belief that the ECD workforce requires a range of particular and different skills to work with children with additional needs. The skills required are those that are needed to work effectively with ANY child and family. Child Australia, since 1987, has helped to include of children with disabilities and, since the mid 1990's, children with additional needs, into mainstream child care settings. We consider that educators should, through their base training, develop the competence and empathy to support learning and development for all children. In some instances they may need to learn a new technique, or use specialist communication tools, language or culturally specific tools/aids. They may also require information/advice/resources/training to build knowledge and confidence in their capabilities. • The IPSP program currently provides a range of supports to include children with additional needs, including additional funding to decrease the adult to child ration in ECEC settings. We consider that ISA, IPSU and PSC support is invaluable to the

Question	Comments and possible actions
	<p>sector. An extension of these support programs in the short term would enable further capacity and confidence building.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our experience suggests that the lack of experienced leaders in the ECEC sector impacts significantly in the successful inclusion of children with additional needs. Building and retaining sector leaders will, in turn, build the confidence and skills of Educators as they will have more positive role models demonstrating quality inclusive practice. • Child Australia does not support the practice of 1:1 aides for children with disabilities as this does not promote inclusive practice. It also keeps relevant knowledge about the individual child “contained” to a single staff member and does not enable other Educators to grow their practice.
<p><i>How appropriate are the remuneration and conditions for ECD workers for children with additional needs?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the ECEC environment, the Inclusion Support Subsidy is a contribution towards the cost of employing an additional Educator to reduce the adult to child ratio where a service enrolls a child with high and ongoing support needs. The subsidy amount is inadequate as it places financial burden on the service including the child. In practice, it makes services reluctant to enrol children with high and ongoing support needs.