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Submission to the Productivity Commission prepared by Queensland Children's Activities Network.

Current and future demand for ECD workers, and the mix of knowledge and skills required within the workforce to meet quality objectives

- The Outside School Hours Care workforce is diverse. The traditional leisure/recreation base of the sector means that the school age care workforce must be drawn from a broad base of skills. Qualifications in sport and recreation that well prepare the workforce for employment within OSHC need to be retained for this type of service. There is a basic skill set required to work within OSHC which includes knowledge of middle childhood development; child protection; regulations etc but also includes skills in developing and implementing engaging recreation and leisure programs for school age children which extend their physical, social, emotional, creative and cognitive development in appropriate ways.
- The OSHC sector would become limited in both educators and the diverse skills sets and experience bases that can be drawn upon if the Qualification regime became too prescriptive. A good example of the broad range of skills that contribute to a qualified school age care educator are described in the Queensland Child Care Regulation (2003) – there were amendments to broaden the scope after 2003 following an extensive consultation with the sector – a report on these findings is available.

The current and future supply of the ECD workforce, and the impact of quality objectives on that supply:

- The current supply of the school age care workforce is drawn from a diverse skills and experience base. The high degree of casual employment and the short hours mean that attracting highly qualified, experienced and dedicated staff can be a challenge as working in OSHC may not be their only or even primary place of employment/source of income. In the case of students working in the sector, their time in the sector is often limited as their studies lead them to a permanent full time position, often in a related field, but not always. The future supply of the school age care workforce may not change significantly if issues such remuneration and employment conditions (in some jurisdictions) are not addressed.

- Quality objectives will impact on the role of the educator in OSHC. Favourably, this would lead to greater recognition of the role and educator time allocated to planning, professional preparation and learning and evaluation of programs and experiences.
- If changes to ratios occurred as part of the quality reforms for OSHC and that this was articulated as less than the current minimum standard of 1:15 then more educators would be required. Educators and service providers need to be consulted about working conditions with 1:15 ratios and the impact on their ability to successfully engage with and embed principles, practices and outcomes of “My Time, Our Place.”

The structure of the ECD workforce, and its efficiency and effectiveness:

- The OSHC workforce efficiency has substantial room for improvement. There are many opportunities that should be explored to encourage efficiency and enhance effectiveness. These include recognising the skills that are being developed by Educator’s in school age care and exploring other possibilities to increase their employment ie educators who work in OSHC sometimes work in the school as teacher aides which has many benefits for a school, OSHC service and the educator. Recognition of the skills developed by pre-service teachers through their work in OSHC as educators.

ECD workforce planning and development in the short, medium and long-term

- Demand for Outside School Hours Care services is constantly increasing. OSHC has been described as the fastest growing sub sector within child care. Setting a goal or establishing a vision for where we would like to see the workforce in the long-term will enable short term and medium term plans to be articulated and a methodology established for working towards the attainment of that goal. Such a plan should also include a commitment to development funding for the OSHC workforce as many of the current initiatives have excluded or had low level engagement from the OSHC sector.

Institutional arrangements impacting on the ECD workforce

- Outside School Hours Care attracts a diverse workforce. Many university students attain employment within the sector while they are studying. For many pre-service teachers, working in OSHC actively supports their preparation for teaching, particularly in developing skills for engaging with and managing groups of children. A partnership between the sector and universities would be well received so that the sector could offer practicum placements for university students. This is a real possibility now that the school age care sector will be working with the framework ‘My Time, Our Place’ to guide program and practice.

For further information regarding this submission, please contact:

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