

**SUBMISSION RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S  
DRAFT RESEARCH REPORT ON THE  
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WORKFORCE**

**INSTITUTE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD  
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The Institute of Early Childhood (IEC) has an established national reputation for providing high quality undergraduate and postgraduate programs for students seeking to teach in the prior-to-school sector or in primary schools. The history of the IEC can be traced back to the late 19th Century, when the Kindergarten Union established a course to train early childhood teachers. The course was subsequently extended to a three year degree program, with an emphasis on the education of young children. Previously operating as the Kindergarten Teachers' College and Nursery School Teachers' College and later as part of the Sydney College of Advanced Education, the IEC was established in 1989 as part of Macquarie University. A key strength of the IEC at this time was its leadership role as Australia's only fully autonomous early childhood institution. The Institute today has a strong Institute Advisory Board with representatives of the field. This, along with the demands of the University's Higher Education Board, has meant the regular revisions of programs to be academically sound and relevant to the demands of the profession.

This submission to the Draft research report on the Early Childhood Development Workforce is informed by Australian and international research, and on our collective experience and expertise as academics and researchers in early childhood education. The IEC welcomes the Council of Australian Government's recognition of the importance of the early years and its commitment to improving quality early childhood education and care. Consideration and implementation of significant and long overdue workforce reforms are critical to sustained improvements in both quality standards and practices across the sector.

We congratulate the Productivity Commission for compiling a comprehensive and considered draft report.

We concur with some key premises of the report:

- A more qualified workforce is needed not only to meet the requirements of the National Quality Standard, but also to raise quality practices so that high quality education and care is the norm, not the exception, in the sector
- Current wages, work conditions, and limited career paths are key barriers to the provision of high quality education for young children

- Incentives are needed to attract and retain early childhood staff, teachers in particular and especially those employed in LDC and in Indigenous communities. Specifically, wage increases, improved working conditions, and sustained professional development support is required
- Careful consideration of ECEC provisions for children with additional needs is needed to ensure equitable opportunities for all children.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to inform policy development in the following key areas:

### **Government involvement in the early childhood development sector**

#### *Continued commitment to the NQF reforms*

We note that the report on a number of occasions poses the question of whether the current timeframe for the NQF should be extended. We believe that the reform goals should not be compromised, nor the current timeframes be revised, because of existing labour market shortfalls. Rather, the reform goals should provide the impetus for workforce reforms to be accelerated. International reports such as OECD Starting Strong II (2006) and UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 8 (2008) demonstrate Australia's poor comparative investment and performance in key areas of early childhood provision. The reforms to the Australian early childhood sector can no longer be delayed.

#### *Ensuring equity of access to quality ECEC*

We support the sentiment of recommendation 3.2, that current reforms must not prohibit the participation of children from disadvantaged communities in high quality ECEC. Rather than the proposed support for parents, however, we concur with Cox (2006) who has long argued that public investment will be more effective if deployed as operational funding to centres, rather than fee subsidies to parents.

Additionally, we strongly support recommendation 8.1, that reforms to processes and funding are needed to ensure that children with additional needs are provided with access to ECEC and to the support needed within these settings. However, we also suggest that this support is extended to children who have additional needs that fall outside of the prescribed diagnostic and funding criteria. As outlined by Lachlan and Boyle (2007), the dependency on labels for inclusion support is problematic for the children, families and staff involved. Furthermore, as noted in the report, at present the provision of support is primarily determined by funding restrictions, rather than by the need for additional support.

*Transparency of the NQF and accountability for service quality*

Draft recommendation 3.1 notes that “governments should require ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information on service quality”. We support the publishing of such information to inform parents’ decision-making as to which service they will enrol their child. We also see that the publishing of such information as critical for accountability and research purposes. Access to information about a service’s provision of quality, particularly in for profit centres, has in the past been difficult. All services ought to be publically accountable for the provision of quality they are providing. We recommend that data gathered from the NQS and Assessment and Rating System also be collated and made publically available. Information pertaining to quality ratings by geographical area, service type, and profit status, for example, would provide critical data for further research and policy development. We also support the publishing of service waivers that have been granted, as per recommendation 3.3. We do however caution against publishing of information that can appear misleading or does not accurately reflect genuine quality elements of a program. Considerable thought needs to be given to how less tangible elements of quality can be accurately reflected and interpreted in meaningful ways by the general public.

**The preschool and long day care workforce**

*Building quality ECE through top down rather than bottom up workforce initiatives*

Teacher and educator qualification requirements in the NQS are indicative of a bottom up approach by COAG to lift quality standards and practices. Initiatives have sought to ensure that teacher requirements aside, by 2014 all other staff will have (or be actively working towards) either a Certificate III or a Diploma in Children’s Services qualification. New teacher requirements of one teacher in every service licensed for 25 children or more is an improvement in some but not all states.

Recent case studies of centres externally rated as consistently providing high quality ECEC (Fenech, Harrison, Press, & Sumsion, 2010) and the renowned EPPE (Sylva, 2004) and ELEYS (Siraj-Blatchford, & Manni, 2007) studies testify to a core of qualified early childhood teachers and strong pedagogical and service leadership providing platform from which quality ECEC can be provided. We propose that targeting the top end of the workforce requiring a core of early childhood teachers in each service and providing professional development opportunities in leadership will more effectively lead to sustained quality improvements across the sector.

Three years ago, Australia was found languishing at the bottom of the leagues table when the Innocenti Report Card 8 (UNICEF, 2008) assessed how 25 OECD countries performed

their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Of the ten benchmarks, Australia was able to satisfy only two and one of these related to staff qualifications. Specifically, this benchmark, sets out the minimum requirement for staff qualification as being

“that at least 50 per cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years tertiary education with a recognised qualification in early childhood studies or a related field.” (UNICEF, 2008, p.8)

Accordingly, it is our contention that the use of the Certificate III as the basic qualification for EC staff is a retrograde step that can tarnish Australia’s international profile in provisioning high quality ECEC services. We believe that the Certificate III is appropriate only as an induction strategy for those considering working in the sector, or have worked as untrained assistants and/or do not have sufficient matriculation results to gain entry into a university degree in the first instance. Importantly, the Certificate III must not be confused as an initial professional qualification expected of anyone with responsibilities for designing and implementing children’s programs in preschool and LDC settings.

The draft report noted that governments in most countries did not specify qualifications expected of all staff employed in ECEC services (2011, p.351) and that typically, ECTs had little or no parity with employment conditions enjoyed by school teachers. The report however does acknowledge that there is research evidence to show that qualified staff are an indicator of excellent quality (see for example, p. 165, p.355), and that in many countries, preschool education was typically “presented by a degree qualified teacher” (p.352).

We also believe that by bringing in matters relating to the involvement of health care workers into this debate at this stage, adds to the complexity of the issues and detracts from the main game – children’s learning during early childhood. We agree that much can be gained by encouraging collaboration with other professionals, not just health care workers, who engage with young children and their families. However, it is imperative that a sustained focus on early years learning is critical at this stage, to maximise quality outcomes for young children during birth to five years.

#### *Improving the supply and retention of early childhood teachers (ECTs)*

Of significance for NSW is the poor status and standing of early childhood teachers in prior to school settings. These teachers are internationally recognised as a key component of the provision of high quality early childhood education programs that are necessary to achieve the outcomes that Australia strives to realise for all its citizens (Fenech, 2010; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). It is essential at this time to improve the working conditions, status and standing of early childhood teachers in prior to school settings and attract the highest quality candidates into early childhood teaching careers, if Australia is to realise its goals for redressing the effects of disadvantage for our children.

Improved working conditions for ECTs and pay parity with teachers employed in the school sector is critical to attracting and retaining teacher professionals. We recommend that Draft Finding 5.1 be made a Recommendation.

To increase the supply of ECTs and thus meet its commitment to providing a Universal Access program in 2013, the Australian Government has increased the number of university early childhood teacher places. While enrolments have modestly increased, the entrance ranking across some of the universities offering early childhood programs has dropped significantly to attract students to fill the available places. This situation is highly problematic as the calibre of teaching graduates – and ultimately the success of policy reforms – is potentially compromised. Moreover, many students enter early childhood programs and then transfer to primary and secondary education courses when they come to understand the significant difference in pay that exists between school-based teaching employment and that in the prior to school early childhood sector. Both scenarios translate to early childhood teacher education programs not attracting the best and brightest education students. This will have long term effects on the early childhood sector and its ability to provide young children with the highest quality teaching that research suggests is necessary for their optimal growth and development in these formative early years. Improving quality ECEC requires highly skilled graduates who have a strong theoretical base and a commitment to providing quality practices. Improved pay and working conditions will attract higher calibre students who have the potential to implement the pedagogical, management and leadership responsibilities that will be required of them once employed in the sector.

Given that early childhood teachers in prior to school settings have lower status but arguably more accountabilities and responsibilities than teachers in school settings, it is unsurprising that many pre-service teachers actively choose to not work in the prior to school sector. It is also unsurprising that many teachers in prior to school settings either leave the field to take up more highly regarded and better paid positions as teachers in schools, or leave the teaching profession completely. In light of the rising importance of children's early childhood experiences prior to formal schooling, it is timely that due recognition be given to early childhood teachers who carry the weight of responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of early childhood programs and the consequent outcomes for the future of Australia's children.

#### *Delivery of the Universal Access program*

Given the current shortage of ECTs we consider it appropriate that for the short term, 3-year qualified teachers deliver this program. This interim period, however, should be limited to five years, with four year qualified ECTs required from January 1, 2017. In this five year time frame all three year qualified ECTs would be required to upgrade to a four year teaching qualification. This upgrade would need to be facilitated by the provision of intensive university upgrade programs. There is perhaps scope for greater partnership

between Professional Development Coordinators (PSCs) and Universities to offer pathway programs for those holding a three year teaching qualification to upgrade via participation in specific professional learning programs toward the required credential. This would serve the dual purpose of re-engaging three year qualified teachers with professional learning targeting the aims of the National Quality Framework while gaining credit toward a required credential.

To delay further will devalue a four year early childhood teaching qualification and provide a further barrier to creating much needed equal status and pay parity with teachers in primary schools (4-year degree qualified). The introduction of the EYLF and the successful implementation of this policy initiative require highly skilled 4-year university qualified teachers equipped to plan child-centred educative programs, provide pedagogical leadership in their setting, and assess and report on stated outcomes. These high level responsibilities place teachers in prior to school settings in the same position as teachers in primary schools in relation to their responsibilities for curriculum development, assessment and reporting and as such it will be essential that their pay and working conditions reflect this parity.

Recent international studies, for example the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) from the United Kingdom have stressed the important role that teachers play in educational outcomes of young children. This study demonstrated the close connection between the quality of teachers and the achievements of children. This study also exposed some of the high level and intentional pedagogical practices that early childhood teachers engage in when they support children's learning effectively. Practices such as 'sustained shared thinking' and engaging children in the development of their own curriculum ideas (Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Eliot, 2003), demonstrated the complex nature of effective teaching of children prior to school age. The study leaves little question that the practice of teaching in early childhood is at least equal in complexity to teaching practices undertaken by 4-year qualified teachers found more commonly in schools.

#### *Early Childhood Teachers for all children in all services*

An outcome of both the Universal Access initiative (targeted to children in the year prior to attending school) and the proposed NQS (which requires only one ECT for all services, irrespective of the number of children the service is licensed for) is that ECTs are most likely to work with older children enrolled in their respective early childhood service. This scenario entrenches the bifurcation of education and care (Cheeseman & Torr, 2009) and diminishes the value of play-based learning for children from birth, as promoted in the EYLF. International research from a broad range of disciplines has acknowledged the critical importance of the earliest years in a child's life. Such evidence supports the rights of infants and toddlers to be provided with quality curriculum, pedagogy and practice. Teachers with university qualifications have been shown to provide higher quality interpretations of



infants' behaviour as they are attuned to their verbal and non-verbal communication cues (Degotardi & Davis, 2008). Such interpretation by adults is viewed as central to infant pedagogy and is seen to influence the child's overall development (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosely, & Fleege, 1993). Infants' peer relationships can also be recognised and fostered by teachers as they can be significant predictors of later social and emotional competence as well as academic success in school (Campbell, Lamb, & Hwang, 2000; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994). Therefore the relationship of the teacher with infants is crucial for all aspects of the child's development.

Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics' (2010) figures show that 30.3% of children under two years of age attend formal childcare. Such high statistics further support the need for trained teachers who will help provide the child with tailored support and opportunities to evaluate educational progress and guide them to reach their full potential. We believe that a core of ECTs - one per room should be mandatory. This is for pedagogical reasons that will support children's developmental outcomes, but also because of the complex work with families that ECTs engage in. In attending to the educational needs of a range of children, early childhood teachers in prior to school settings come across a significant proportion of children for whom English is their second language. Given the young age of children attending prior to schools settings, this can be the first experience that many young children encounter with English. This factor brings increased complexity to the work of teachers in prior to school settings. While some support is offered to services in the form of government funding through the State Government Supporting Children with Additional Needs (SCAN) program or through the Australian Government funded ISP (Inclusion Support Program), these supports are offered on a priority basis often allocated to children with higher support needs. Many early childhood settings accommodating children with little or no English operate with no formal support placing significant demands on teachers in those settings. Most school settings offer ESL staff specialists to assist children in their transition to English providing greater support for classroom teachers

### **Developing the ECEC workforce**

#### *Birth to 12 years teaching degrees*

The shift from birth – 8 teaching degree programs to birth – 12 has proven appealing to students who, at the time of enrolment, perceive the broader focus as providing them with greater status and future career options. Previously graduates of birth – 8 programs encountered barriers to their employment in primary schools, yet it was often reported when they did gain employment in primary schools that they made a valuable contribution to the overall educational quality of primary school education, especially in the early years.

Offering birth – 12 degrees has been advantageous for the University and the IEC because these programs can be marketed to a broader undergraduate cohort. From a curriculum

perspective, however, this shift may in time mean that depth of content will be sacrificed for breadth. Additionally, some focus on the early years may need to be sacrificed so that NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) school-content requirements can be met. Presently, such requirements are stronger than those specified by the accrediting agency for equivalent prior to school programs.

The introduction of birth – 12 early childhood teacher programs has also impacted on student engagement. While the program can equip students to work in either the school or prior-to-school sectors, many students – even in the first semester of their candidature – articulate established views about which sector they will work in. From our experience, a minority of students are undecided. This means that students' intent on working in the school sector can engage less with ECEC specific content, and conversely, students intent on working in the ECEC sector can engage less with school specific content.

These issues are compounded in NSW, with the state-based Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) only accrediting teachers who implement the NSW Board of Studies Curriculum, in other words, school-based teachers. This criterion has remained despite the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework in prior-to-school settings, and the pedagogical leadership and accountability ECTs will have to demonstrate once the NQF comes into effect in January 2012. It is important that all University qualified teachers are eligible for professional teacher registration in establishing a platform of equal status. This is a matter of some urgency in NSW where most ECT's are not eligible for professional registration.

### *English proficiency*

We agree that staff from CALD backgrounds can potentially play an important role in the provision of quality ECEC and in enhancing access and equity for children and families from CALD backgrounds. Additionally, as leaders in the field who work with children and multiple stakeholders, ECTs must be proficient in the English language and be able to professionally communicate both verbally and in writing. At times, however, the English language competencies of pre-service teachers, graduate teachers, and other staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is concerning. Some VET programs offer a standards based program, with little requirement for students to use extended oral or written language standards to be considered competent.

It is important that this lack of English language and literacy proficiency be addressed as the quality of staff-child interactions is strongly related to positive outcomes for children, including linguistic, cognitive and social outcomes (Sylva et al, 2004). Stringent English language requirements at both VET and University entry points are required. To support this strategy both vocational and University programs could include academic literacy skills as foundational to their programs.



### **Professional development and support (PD&S)**

Teachers' ongoing professional development is critical to quality practice and improvement. Greater support for ECTs to access professional development opportunities is needed. Limited budgets can mean that support for staff equates to attendance at technical training (eg., OH&S; child protection) workshops only. These workshops are necessary to ensure that teachers meet their legal accountabilities, but do not lead to overall quality improvement.

English language professional development courses should be made available for ECEC staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Ideally, such courses would take a functional approach to English language learning, and thus be grounded in the ECEC context. This initiative is critical to ensuring that the ECEC workforce provides positive role models of English for young children. It is not intended to negate the value of a culturally diverse workforce and the rich experiences such diversity can offer children in prior-to-school settings.

A review of the Professional Support Co-ordinators' program is timely and requires greater national co-ordination. Given the nature of the national Reform Agenda and the imperative of the national Quality Framework and Standards, the work of the PSC's need to avoid undue duplication and act to strengthen national consistency. There are untapped opportunities for greater partnerships between PSC's and Universities / TAFE. The development of shared programs resulting in credentialing of participants makes sense in overcoming the critical shortage of suitably qualified staff. We recommend greater synergies between University / TAFE programs and the professional learning offered through the PSC's. Please also refer to the work of Waniganayake et al (2008) report showing strong evidence that short introductory type workshops do little to promoted sustained change in an early childhood settings. We have found the thinking and approach of the Belgium Government (see Pirard, 2011) to be worthy of consideration in dissemination of their new curriculum document. Resourcing professional learning through a structured support and mentoring strategy to build sustained leadership is a strong model of effective change. Together with Caldwell (2008), such approaches to on-going professional learning are based on strengthening a talented workforce rather than a focus on simplistic demonstration of minimum standards. We strongly support a leadership approach to workforce reform and question approaches which aim to achieve change through minor improvements at the lowest levels of skills and qualifications.

The Productivity Commission highlighted the importance of augmenting formal qualifications with participation in continuous professional learning (p.163). As per the PSC Practice Potentials Report (Waniganayake, Harrison, Cheeseman, De Gioia, Burgess, & Press, 2008), we wish to reinforce Draft Recommendation 4 which proposed the establishment of

“a minimum standard of 5 days per year of planned PD&S for each children’s services practitioner employed in a prior to school setting” (p.2). This recommendation, if enacted, could contribute to achieving parity for ECTs with school teachers by legitimising access to funded professional learning, as both a right and a responsibility.

Likewise, we also believe that given the fast paced social and policy changes and increasingly complex family demands encountered by contemporary EC teachers, access to appropriate professional development opportunities for senior staff holding management and leadership roles is essential. This suggestion was reflected in Draft Recommendation 12 presented in Waniganayake et al (2008). We add that Macquarie University offers a dedicated Master of Educational Leadership for early childhood practitioners, delivered flexibly by incorporating both on-campus and online teaching and learning strategies.

### *Upgrading of diploma qualifications*

As noted in the draft report, the proliferation of RTOs has meant that staff in the sector may attain a VET qualification that is not rigorous. Should diploma trained staff enrol in an early childhood teaching degree program the limited quality of some VET programs has significant implications for teaching and learning in higher education, particularly as these students receive exemptions from the degree program. Low literacy levels, for example, is an ongoing problem. While the employment of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds enriches a service’s programs, sound literacy skills are fundamental to effective practice and need to be addressed at all training levels including VET training stage.

Across universities that offer early childhood teaching qualifications there are stark inconsistencies in the amount of exemptions given to students with a Diploma. This means that early childhood degree completion requirements vary markedly from institution to institution. The recognition of teacher qualifications by government licensing bodies of prior to school settings is generally much weaker than that required for teachers in schools. There need to be attention given to a rigorous credentialing of teacher education courses with consistent requirements for professional experience (practicum) and content related to national reform targets and identified learning outcomes for young children. We agree that there is currently a lack of clear and workable pathways for diploma students to articulate into a teaching degree qualification.

Greater consistency and rigour is needed to ensure that teacher graduates enter the workforce with a strong theoretical and research knowledge base (see, Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart and Elliot, 2002). Additionally, as pedagogical leaders with multiple accountabilities teacher graduates intent on providing quality education for young children will also have developed skills in critical thinking: being able to think independently with reference to a discipline specific knowledge base; seeking, synthesising and applying new knowledge to current practices; analysing and critiquing current and possible approaches to teaching and learning. In sum, graduates teachers need to be

equipped to practice as teaching professionals, not technicians. A national government strategy is urgently needed to build a strong early childhood teacher workforce. This strategy could encompass the implementation of a national independent association for teachers (see below.)

### *Practicum experience*

As noted in the report there is a stark shortage of quality professional experience placements in the prior-to-school sector for pre-service teachers. Upon returning from their practicum it is not uncommon for students to report incidents that are indicative of unsatisfactory practice. Clearly such experiences do not provide a good foundation on which to build a quality workforce.

Draft recommendation 10.1 states that “The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council should consider specifying the minimum periods of training and practicum associated with children’s services qualifications”. We do not consider it appropriate that a Council body whose core business is not education have the authority to determine training and practicum requirements for ECTs. This responsibility should rest with a professional teacher registration board (see section below).

Given the importance of professional experience or practicum to all teacher education programs we encourage a closer examination of how government funds for student supervision of professional experience are allocated ensuring that these funds are adequate to attract high quality mentors to support and guide students in their reflective practice.

### *Teacher registration*

Notwithstanding the importance of ECEC teachers having the same status as their primary teaching counterparts, in the current context teachers do not enjoy the professional status their role and responsibilities warrant. Significantly in Finland, renowned for outstanding performance in PISA assessments, all teachers have a high level knowledge and skills base and accordingly also command high professional status (Caldwell, 2008). There is a stark need in Australia for the status of the teaching profession to be enhanced.

It is our contention that the attraction and retention of ECTs in prior to school settings is reliant on achieving pay parity with school teachers. This process can begin with the incorporation of approved EC degrees available throughout Australia into the nationally accredited initial teacher education programs. There is an urgent need for consistency and better alignment between differing national standards covering ECTs and school teachers. For instance, ECTs working in prior to school settings, sit outside the national professional standards and procedures being established through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Likewise, links between the AITSL standards and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in relation to ECTs and other EC staff also require

some clarification. Government recognition and appropriate remuneration of ECTs who have completed a degree that is recognised as a nationally accredited initial teacher education program, can enhance the status of these professionals, and this is long overdue.

If ECTs are not able to gain professional recognition with this body we recommend a specific early childhood teacher registration body that would:

- represent and advocate for the interests of teachers;
- develop a national teachers' code of ethics;
- provide approved professional development workshops and courses for teachers, including much needed courses in management and leadership, working with children with additional needs, and working in an integrated service model;
- provide professional support and career development advice;
- stipulate which approved VET courses are eligible for entry to teaching degree courses and how much credit graduates of these courses would gain;
- provide opportunities for teachers to network and develop their own learning communities;
- establish a new national teacher education journal; and
- develop consistent practicum requirements.

Professional registration to this Association would be mandatory, and accordingly made a requirement of both the National Quality Standard and government teacher accreditation bodies.

### **Workforce for Indigenous ECEC services**

The Institute of Early Childhood along with Warawara, Department of Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University offers a highly successful Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Services) degree available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This program currently qualifies graduates to teach in prior to school services (preschools and long day care centres). The program is highly regarded both nationally and internationally. Ramsay (2000) cited this program as an example of a centre of excellence in teacher education. In referring to IEC, the report states, "Innovative models which embed teacher education in an inter-disciplinary mix focused on building professional standards are ones which the Review endorses" (p. 49).

Our experience in offering this program over the last ten years has provided significant insight into critical issues for the development of a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood teacher workforce.

Reviews of the literature highlight the importance of university qualifications for achieving optimal outcomes in early childhood education and strengthening community capacity building (Cassady, Fleet, Hughes, & Kitson, 2004; 2005). There are specific issues which have been identified as important for the early childhood education of Indigenous Australian

children. A study by Fasoli & Ford (2001, p. 22) suggested that a “focus on relationships is critical in dealing with Indigenous children in early childhood settings”. Their study indicates an understanding exists between Indigenous staff and Indigenous children, based on relationships. This relationship is not always present with non-Indigenous staff. “Clearly, this suggests that...it is critical to employ Aboriginal staff where there are Aboriginal children in an early childhood setting” (p. 22).

A key strength of the BTeach(ECS) program is its proven capacity to recruit, support and graduate a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood teachers. Notably, some of these students are from remote locations where there are precious few pathway options to higher education. In addition, graduates are either already employed or immediately find employment or promoted into higher levels of responsibility demonstrating the high regard that ‘industry’ has for this program. Follow up research (Hughes, Fleet, & Nicholls, 2003; Fleet & Kitson, 2009) indicates that graduates are working in a range of capacities, including mentorship of students at TAFE and through the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) and work in regional early childhood services. Several students have been promoted to director and group leader positions within their services and two graduates were intending to pursue graduate studies in other states, one with the goal of teaching her own language in early childhood centres.

This program is unique among similar Indigenous early childhood programs, in that it is delivered in residential block mode, enabling students to attend on campus sessions for approximately ten days, four times a year. This federally funded provision enables the students to have the benefit of a culturally safe study environment (in line with an approach that has worked for and is supported by Warawara while being temporarily relieved of family and community responsibilities. Travel and accommodation are financially supported through federal government programs. In cases where students work directly with young children in a children’s service, “Backfill” provisions are also available, where federal funds are provided for another Indigenous person to step into that student’s role while the student is on-campus or during practice teaching sessions. This financial provision is critical to the success of the program.

This program has proven to be a successful strategy for addressing many of the issues raised in the report. We recommend that there be further examination of successful models of Indigenous higher education and further provision of enabling strategies to support and expand on such programs. This includes:

- appropriate University preparation courses to support students in their introduction to University study,
- continued funding support targeted at enabling students release from their workplace to attend block learning and teaching sessions,
- mentoring and tutorial support,
- a nationally consistent teacher registration requirement enabling such courses to be recognised across all States and Territories,

- Investigating possibilities for offering in-situ programs where students can remain within their communities for supported delivery of some parts of the program.

### **The integrated ECD services workforce**

Integrated service provision brings together multidisciplinary professionals with different and sometimes competing philosophies and practices. Noting these complexities a recent report on integrated service provision in Australia concluded that “the effective governance of integrated services is critical ... it is essential to the success of integrated services that the ECEC program is incorporated as an equal partner in the suite of services available to families, and that the expertise of skilled early childhood professionals is recognised and utilised” (Press, Sumsion, & Wong, 2010, p. f). Achieving these objectives will require highly skilled ECTs who can articulate, model and advocate for high quality play-based learning programs, who either undertake formal leadership positions in these services or who work under a leader that views ECE as described by Press and colleagues. To this end, we do not consider it appropriate that the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council offer VET qualifications that focus on leading and managing integrated ECD services (Draft recommendation 15.2). Rather, postgraduate courses in this area need to be developed. For ECTs, completion of such a postgraduate qualification must be in addition to a four year undergraduate teaching qualification.

We are also concerned that true integration of services will take considerable dismantling of existing silos of service delivery. Research to date is not conclusive that better outcomes for children are derived from integrated services (see Moore, 2008). Attempts to move to integrated services at a time of significant workforce shortage run the risk of adding further complexity to early childhood provision. We agree that much can be gained by encouraging collaboration with other professionals. However, as stated earlier, it is imperative that a sustained focus on early years learning is critical at this stage, to maximise quality outcomes for young children during birth to five years.

### **Support for inclusive ECEC**

The need for greater support to facilitate more equitable access to ECEC for children with additional needs is clearly indicated within the report. Given the many and varied interpretations of the concept of inclusion and inclusive education, it would be helpful to include a definition of inclusion in chapter 8. This would assist with clear interpretation and guide the process of reform in this area.

As noted in the report, there is a growing move towards integrated services. In keeping with this trend, in moving forward with recommendations it is important to note that children with disabilities may also be from CALD and Indigenous backgrounds. Integrated services that take this into account can assist in ensuring that these children and their families, and



the EC staff who work with them, do not face a 'double disadvantage' and are not shut out of important support services or forced to navigate the complexities of multiple services (Pearson & Cologon, 2009).

The report recognises some potential benefits of inclusive ECEC for all children. Research provides evidence of multiple benefits of inclusive ECEC for children with and without additional needs and their teachers, beyond developing sensitivity and awareness (for example: Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Gena, 2006; Hollingsworth, Boone, & Crais, 2009; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004). This research serves to further strengthen the recommendations of this report for action to bring about greater equity in ECEC.

The influence of pre-service teacher education on the success or otherwise of inclusive ECEC has been widely documented. The role of Inclusion Support Workers (ISW) is also clearly recognised in the draft report. Whilst concerns that requiring qualifications would limit the ISW workforce are understandable in the short term, such a requirement would enable greater equity and likely lead to overall improvements in the long term. Consequently, while we support recommendation 8.2, consideration of a timeframe for requiring qualifications for ISWs would strengthen the move towards inclusive ECEC.

Concomitantly, the recognition of the need for professional development for ISWs is to be applauded. However, in order to ensure that children with additional needs are given access to high quality teaching and to enhance the collaborations between staff within services, professional learning needs to occur in partnership for ISWs and the ECTs with whom they work. ISWs do not replace the role of the ECT in relation to children with special needs and careful collaboration is required to ensure this does not occur. Research has demonstrated that teachers who believe that they hold the primary responsibility for the education and care of all children in any given setting (including children with additional needs) are more engaged and effective teachers and their settings are more likely to be genuinely inclusive (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). Professional development for all staff needs to take this into account. Furthermore, research provides evidence to suggest that a shared vision and common goals is essential to inclusive education (Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009). Joint professional development with ECTs and ISWs could facilitate this process.

#### *Occasional Care workforce*

The report states that "Given that children typically spend limited time in OC, and OC thus has a relatively limited scope to contribute to cognitive development, there is no compelling case to impose mandatory qualification requirements on OC". However, there are some OC services where children do spend considerable periods of time, so it may be worthwhile to consider mandatory qualification levels where children typically spend several hours per week in OC.

**Points that require correction/clarification**

We would like to take this opportunity to clarify some problematic terminology used in the report:

*Perception that the Universal Access program is targeted to “preschool”*

Statements made throughout the report appear to confine the Australian Government’s Universal Access program to “15 hours of *preschool* (our emphasis)” (p. xxiv). This is not correct

(see [http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy\\_Agenda/ECUA/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/ECUA/Pages/home.aspx) which refers to access to an “early childhood education program”). Use of the term “preschool” in this context adds to the simplistic bifurcation of education (preschools) and care (long day care) noted by Cheesman and Torr (2009).

*Composition of ECEC workers*

The report notes that the ECEC workforce comprises two distinct groups: service directors and teachers, and contact workers (p. xxvi). This delineation seems a simplistic one, given that directors may not be university qualified, and also belittles the skills and expertise of ECTs. We recommend that the revised report groups contact staff according to qualification: university qualified teachers, VET trained workers, and unqualified staff. Census data should be collected and analysed as per these three groupings.

*Use of the term ‘training’*

We find the use of the term ‘training’ throughout the report inappropriate and a contributor to the entrenched low status of ECTs. ‘Training’ pertains to the gaining of technical knowledge and skills and as such is more pertinent to staff undertaking competency based courses. ‘Professional learning’ more appropriately reflects the higher level expertise gained by pre-service teachers undertaking a teaching degree qualification.



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