

Early Childhood Teacher Education Council (ECTEC) NSW Response to *Early Childhood Development Workforce Productivity Commission Draft Research Report June 2011*

The Early Childhood Teacher Education Council NSW (ECTEC) is comprised of the heads and senior lecturers of early childhood teacher education programs in NSW universities. The universities represented are The University of Newcastle, Charles Sturt University, Southern Cross University, University of Western Sydney, Macquarie University, Sydney University, Notre Dame University, Australian Catholic University, Wollongong University, Avondale College, and University of New England. The members, representing their universities would like to thank the Productivity Commission for their report and seek your attention to the following matters.

Draft recommendations, findings and information requests

Chapter 3 Government involvement in the early childhood development sector

DRAFT FINDING 3.1

Though the implementation of the universal aspects of the early childhood development (ECD) policy agenda will be costly overall, the targeting of relatively small additional funding to certain aspects of the ECD workforce may deliver substantial additional benefits to the community.

DRAFT FINDING 3.2

Market pressures alone are unlikely to lead to the provision of quality ECD services. An appropriate regulatory system aimed at quality improvement and assurance is required.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.1

To assist parents' decision making with respect to their choice of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for their children, governments should require ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information on service quality. Published information should be comprehensive, comparable across services, clearly explained and easy to access.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.2

To achieve the goals of the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) ECEC reforms without disadvantaging low-income families through the anticipated increase in fees, governments will need to ensure that there is adequate financial support for such families.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.3

ECEC regulators should publish the number of service waivers granted, to whom they have been granted, and whether they are permanent or temporary.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.4

ECEC regulators should provide for ongoing consultation with stakeholders and timely dissemination of best practice. Governments should ensure that all ECEC regulators initiate robust evaluative processes so that regulatory impacts are minimised.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.5

Where voluntary committees currently manage ECEC services, governments should ensure that professional management support (such as cluster management or other shared services) is readily available to assist with management and leadership.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.6

In implementing the National Quality Standard, governments should ensure adequate resourcing for regulators to enable appropriate training of their staff in the new regulatory arrangements and their effective implementation.

ECTEC: Yes it is appropriate to ensure accountability and have training and support available. But in creating available professional management support the government needs to be mindful that within voluntary committees there is often little expertise and knowledge regarding early childhood education and care. It is the qualified teachers/directors of services who need to be involved in this training with the management committee to support effective communication and relevant roles and responsibilities of the committee and staff. Furthermore, in consideration of the workloads of Directors, provision should be made for appropriate compensation of time for engagement in such courses.

Chapter 5 The preschool and long day care workforce

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.1

To assist in the transition to the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, governments should permit:

- ***any currently employed 3-year-qualified early childhood teacher to deliver the preschool program***

ECTEC: This aligns with the recommendation more closely to that for people re-entering the workforce. Furthermore we seek the government's support in financially supporting early childhood teachers in their further study.

- ***any 3-year-qualified teachers returning to or entering the workforce to deliver the preschool program, provided a plan is in place for them to upgrade their qualification to the equivalent of a 4-year degree.***

ECTEC: This recommendation would continue to position early childhood educators as holding lower status and professionalism in comparison to primary and secondary teachers. International recognition of the importance of the early childhood years was identified within the COAG Report. With the growing professionalization of early childhood to deliberately maintain the educational requirements to a level below that of other teachers would be detrimental to the goals of COAG and children and families. It is recommended that:

Three-year qualified early childhood professionals must show a plan to enrol in degrees to upgrade to 4 year qualifications by 2013, commence by 2014, and show reasonable progress year by year. The upgrade of the degree should be completed by 2018.

There is an emerging body of research that has addressed some of these questions about formal education for early childhood educators. There is clearly evidence that higher levels of teacher qualifications are associated with higher quality classroom environments (Barnett, 2003; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001;

Burchinal et al., 2000; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carroll, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009)).

Carr and Mitchell (2010) state from their literature review of early childhood outcomes regarding the need for having qualified teachers in early childhood that: A 2006 study of 1897 children in 10 countries published in the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* which reported that as the level of teacher education in pre-primary provision increased, the measure of children's language performance at age seven improved. They pointed out that teachers with higher levels of education use more complex language in communicating with children. In the same journal a research study of 800 US four-year-olds reported that the education of the teacher was linked to gains on standardised measures of mathematics skills across the pre-K year.

References:

Barnett, W. S. 2003. Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked with teacher qualifications. *Preschool Policy Matters*, 2. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M. S. (Eds.). (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

Burchinal, M. R., Roberts, J. E., Riggins, R., Jr., Zeisel, S. A., Neebe, E., & Bryant, D. (2000). Relating quality of center-based child care to early cognitive and language development longitudinally. *Child Development*, 71, 339–357.

Carr, M., & Mitchell, L. (2010) *Qualified teachers in early childhood centres: do we need them?* Carr, M. and Mitchell, L. Occasional paper University of Waikato. Retrieved from <http://www.waikato.ac.nz/php/research.php?mode=show&author=23473>

Loeb, S., Fuller, B., Kagan, S. L., & Carroll, B. (2004). Child care in poor communities: Early learning effects of type, quality, and stability. *Child Development*, 75, 47–65.

Shonkoff, J., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2009). *Pre-schools must have educational focus*. Retrieved from <http://www.acer.edu.au/enews/2009/04/pre-school-must-have-educational-focus-says-uk-early-learning-expert>

DRAFT FINDING 5.1

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of early childhood teachers to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, salary and conditions offered by long day care centres will need to be competitive with those offered to primary teachers in the school sector. Community- and privately-managed preschools in New South Wales will also need to offer similarly competitive salaries and conditions for their teachers, which is already the case in other jurisdictions.

DRAFT FINDING 5.2

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of workers with certificate III and diploma qualifications to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, wages for many workers will need to increase, particularly in long day care centres and community- and privately-managed preschools.

ECTEC: This is an unsatisfactory recommendation. While we recognise the financial and personal difficulties for the sector and individuals, we seek your attention to Draft finding 3.1. Though the implementation of the universal aspects of the early childhood development (ECD) policy agenda will be costly overall, the targeting of relatively small additional funding to certain aspects of the ECD workforce may deliver substantial additional benefits to the community. This recommendation is therefore inconsistent with Draft Finding 3.1.

Chapter 6 The family day care workforce

DRAFT FINDING 6.1

To achieve the National Quality Standard, contact worker-to-child ratios for children under school age will increase in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. These changes are likely to lead to cost increases for family day care services in those jurisdictions, which may result in fewer children attending.

DRAFT FINDING 6.2

The National Quality Standard may result in fewer children attending family day care, and hence lower revenue for family day care schemes. In the case of the most marginal family day care schemes, coordination unit revenue could potentially decline below the minimum threshold required for ongoing operation of the scheme.

ECTEC: It is important to maintain the provision of quality care and family day care should be no exception. COAG states that: “A large number of studies point to the critical importance of high quality in child care and preschool. Key aspects of quality linked to positive child outcomes include higher qualifications and standards of training of the early childhood carer, lower staff-to-child ratios and a positive nurturing relationship between the child and a stable care-giver”.

Reference: Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms, COAG Consultation Regulation Impact Statement, p. 7.

Chapter 7 The outside school hours care and occasional care workforces

INFORMATION REQUEST

The Commission seeks further information on outside school hours care and its workforce.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.1

Given the focus of outside school hours care on non-cognitive development through constructive play and socialisation, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements on outside school hours care workers.

INFORMATION REQUEST

The Commission seeks further information on occasional care and its workforce.

ECTEC: Children deserve to have a qualified member of staff who has studied child development to be supervising them in a before and after school age setting. Having staff with no qualifications is unsuitable as group care often brings about issues that staff who are trained are better able to manage in the interests of all stakeholders. Children deserve to be in an environment where they are safe, secure and comfortable.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.2

Given that children typically spend limited time in occasional care, occasional care has relatively limited scope to contribute to cognitive development. As a consequence, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements on occasional care workers.

ECTEC: This recommendation seems short-sighted in light of extensive research about the importance of interactions and learning in the early years.

Chapter 8 The early childhood education and care workforce for children with additional needs

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.1

To ensure that children with additional needs benefit fully from the COAG ECEC reforms, governments should modify the structure and operation of inclusion programs and reassess funding levels so that such programs:

- *provide sufficient funding to support the inclusion of all children with additional needs*
- *cover the full cost of employing inclusion support workers at market wages*
- *provide funding for an inclusion support worker to enable children with high support needs to attend preschool for 15 hours per week in the year before school*
- *have simple and streamlined application processes, which do not place an undue burden on ECEC services*
- *make funding available to ECEC services in a regular and timely manner*
- *provide multiple-year funding, requiring re-application or adjustment only where there is a significant change in the level of need of a particular child or cohort of children.*

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.2

ECTEC: To provide inclusion support staff with the necessary skills to ensure children with additional needs benefit fully from the COAG ECEC reforms, governments should provide additional, priority funding to cover both the cost of relevant in-service training in child development, disability and ECEC, and the cost of replacement staff.

Chapter 9 The early childhood education and care workforce in rural and remote areas

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 9.1

To meet the workforce goals of the COAG ECEC reforms, rural and remote areas will need to attract and retain more workers. Governments should assess the cost effectiveness of existing incentives aimed at increasing recruitment and retention in rural and remote areas. These incentives should be compared against alternative strategies such as:

- *targeted recruitment of workers from rural and remote backgrounds*
- *the delivery of training in rural and remote locations*
- *support for pre-service teachers to experience working life in rural and remote areas.*

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 9.2

To attract and retain sufficient staff to achieve the goals of the COAG ECEC reforms for children in remote areas, governments should provide all ECEC workers in remote communities with timely access to appropriate housing at reasonable cost, including housing for students undertaking placement.

ECTEC: Government could work with universities, particularly the regional universities, to develop incentive and support programs for students from rural and remote regions. The Birth to Five Bachelor degree programs offered by Charles Sturt University and the University of New England are two examples of programs that are designed to support such students.

Chapter 10 Training the early childhood education and care workforce

DRAFT FINDING 10.1

Study participants indicate that the content of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications for ECEC is largely satisfactory, and the methods currently employed to determine course content are appropriate. Opportunities to better tailor training packages towards the requirements of family day care contact workers are being pursued.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.1

The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council should consider specifying the minimum periods of training and practicum associated with children's services qualifications. These minimum periods should be decided in consultation with ECEC providers.

ECTEC: This consultation should also include the training and education providers. All stakeholders in early childhood education must be included in consultations to alleviate the current fragmentation in the sector.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.2

Governments should facilitate access to VET by developing ECEC training programs targeted at contact workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (including English language programs delivered in conjunction with ECEC training).

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.3

Where centre-based training is difficult to facilitate, registered training organisations should offer in-home practical training and assessment for family day care contact workers as an alternative to centre-based training and assessment.

DRAFT FINDING 10.2

Innovations in the delivery of higher education qualifications in ECEC are making study in this area more attractive to a wider pool of graduates. Early childhood teaching qualifications incorporate pedagogical content that is fundamental to sectoral reforms.

DRAFT FINDING 10.3

Career pathways are emerging as ECEC is changing. These pathways are important in attracting, retaining and increasing the skills of staff, and it is important that clear pathways for career advancement are maintained.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.4

The requirement for VET assessors to demonstrate knowledge of current ECEC practices should be enforced by VET regulators. The Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations should design and implement a program of professional development for VET assessors working in ECEC to identify and address gaps in their knowledge of current practice.

It is recommended that this professional development should be planned and implemented in consultation with the university sector. Assessors could be upgrading educational qualifications while undertaking the professional development. This opportunity makes it more appealing to participants.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.6

The Australian Skills Quality Authority should be subject to a performance audit within its first two years of operation. This performance audit should:

- *focus on the ability of the Australian Skills Quality Authority to ensure that ECEC workers receive quality vocational education and training*
- *review the effectiveness of the Australian Skills Quality Authority in enforcing the minimum conditions and standards for initial and ongoing registration*
- *consider the adequacy of the funding allocated to the Australian Skills Quality Authority.*

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.7

ECEC qualifications should be regarded as ‘high risk’ by the Australian Skills Quality Authority and audited accordingly. Organisations found to consistently provide high-quality ECEC training should be subject to progressively less regulatory intervention over time.

DRAFT FINDING 10.5

Higher education providers appear to be equipping early childhood teaching graduates with the skills and knowledge they require, though access to quality practicum placements remains an ongoing concern.

DRAFT FINDING 10.6

Registered training organisations are likely to play an important role in meeting increased demand for higher education qualifications for teachers. This will require strong oversight on the part of regulators responsible for quality assurance.

DRAFT FINDING 10.7

Ongoing professional development is important for maintaining a skilled and capable workforce, allowing ECEC workers to build on base-level skills while promoting quality care. Access to support programs promotes the sharing of knowledge, and is also an important determinant of staff retention.

ECTEC: We applaud any robust accountability requirements. This must be developed in consultation with universities and teacher registration bodies. If pathways for career development are to be simplified, and policies and processes developed for the training sector should take further study and career ladder needs into account. In NSW for example, the current involvement of the NSW Institute of Teachers in early childhood teacher education programs mandates particular requirements that must be considered for professionals considering career and qualification advancement.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.8

Governments should ensure that all workers in ECEC services have access to professional development and support programs. Priority should be given to enabling workers to participate in professional development that will assist them to:

- implement the National Quality Standard and the Early Years Learning Framework***
- include children with disabilities and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in ECEC services***
- enhance the leadership and governance of ECEC services***
- work effectively in integrated ECD services.***

ECTEC: We recommend that the points above be used to develop guidelines for the approval of degree programs that allow three year qualified teachers to upgrade to 4 year degree level (Bachelor or Master).

DRAFT FINDING 10.8

Increased use of technological solutions such as online training packages should continue to be explored as a means of facilitating support networks, mentoring arrangements and providing structured feedback regarding teacher–child interactions. This approach requires ongoing provision of adequate resources.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.9

While there is no case for excluding teachers working in ECEC settings from existing teacher registration requirements in all jurisdictions, governments should not endorse or contribute funding to a registration scheme for non-teacher ECEC workers.

We endorse this point and seek its strengthening. Early Childhood teachers are not always recognised in “teacher registration” schemes such as the NSW Institute of teachers. ALL teachers should have the opportunity for accreditation and registration with an associated institute regardless of the sector in which they work.

Chapter 11 Planning the ECEC workforce

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 11.1

The Early Childhood Development Working Group should ensure that the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy:

- ***contains clearly identified objectives***
- ***uses sound data on the current workforce and clear, robust assumptions about future policies to make projections of expected ECEC workforce demand and supply***
- ***employs the most cost-effective policy instrument (that also takes into account non-financial factors) to address supply limitations***
- ***takes into account both direct and community-wide effects in assessing cost effectiveness.***

*ECTEC: We endorse this recommendation and further seek the inclusion of another dot point to ensure that the Workforce Strategy draws on current national and international **research** that studies the role and work of early childhood educators.*

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