

## **Response from the Tasmanian Ministerial Child Care Advisory Council (MCCAC) to the Productivity Commission Draft Research Report – Early Childhood Development Workforce.**

August 2011

### **General Comments**

There are a number of sound recommendations, however there is concern about whether the recommended strategies will be supported financially, and if so, by whom?

It was hoped that there would be an over-arching recommendation about the workforce related cost burden created through the NQF and the need for this to be funded appropriately. It is not considered realistic that most parents will be able to meet the additional costs, given that the majority of the ECEC sector has to work under a business model. MCCAC is supportive of the reforms and their intent, particularly about increasing the professionalism of the sector and improving quality and outcomes for children

### **Comments on Recommendations and Findings**

#### *Draft Recommendation 3.2*

MCCAC queries why the reference to fee increases should just apply to low-income families. Also, Tasmania currently provides a universal free school system, including kindergarten (preschool under the NQF) and will not be likely to provide any additional funding support to the remainder of the education and care sector, seeing this as a Commonwealth responsibility. It is important to note that a strong influence on quality ECD services is attracting people with the required attributes and capacity by ensuring appropriate remuneration, it is not just about having an appropriate regulatory system aimed at quality improvement and assurance.

#### *Draft Recommendation 3.3*

There are two types of waivers, temporary waivers and service waivers. There would there need to be an explanation of what the waivers mean and for any service with one what they cover to ensure clarity.

#### *Draft recommendation 3.5*

Professional management support is already readily available within Tasmania to assist management committees with management and leadership (and may be available in other jurisdictions as well. Management Committees should be strongly encouraged to engage in this opportunity and this strategy would support a proactive approach to sound governance.

#### *Draft Recommendation 5.1*

- The second dot point is sound, however MCCAC recommends that the requirement for a plan to upgrade the qualification is also applied to the group in the 1<sup>st</sup> dot point, that is, those that are currently employed.
- Any plan needs a timeframe built into it otherwise there is no accountability.
- The Tasmanian requirement for teacher registration is for a four year degree qualification and the Tasmanian ECEC sector believes that all teachers in all ECEC settings should be four year qualified.

#### *Draft Findings 6.1 & 6.2*

- It is noted that the findings indicate that there are likely to be increased costs for Family Day Care in those jurisdictions where the educator:child ratios will increase. There are jurisdictions where these ratios are currently in place, and yet there is little information in the Report about whether the Schemes in those jurisdictions are remaining viable and also affordable for parents.
- MCCAC suggests that a recommendation should be made from these findings.

#### *Draft Recommendation 7.1*

- This recommendation does not appear to reflect some of the statements within the Report and also does not reflect the broader developmental needs of children attending Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) programs. All children should have the right to access quality programs and qualifications of educators have been identified as a key influence in the delivery of quality programs. It is vital that people engaged to work with school age children have the required skills, knowledge and attributes to support and enhance children's overall wellbeing in this age cohort.
  - Pg 110 refers to the capacity of OSHC services to assist in the development of non-cognitive skills, the importance of non-cognitive skills in assisting in the formation of cognitive skills and that many employers consider it necessary for some OSHC workers to hold high level ECEC qualifications.
- The recommendation appears to undermine the importance of qualified staff input into the broader developmental needs of this group of children.
- It is also not clear what 'additional' qualification requirements means given that in some jurisdictions there are currently none.

#### *Draft Recommendation 7.2*

- This recommendation undermines the value that occasional care services can play in the lives of children. As above all children should have the right and opportunity to access quality programs operated by qualified educators. The statement 'occasional care has relatively limited scope to contribute to cognitive development' depicts a lack of understanding of the importance of social and emotional development and wellbeing in the early years and the influence educators play in this (even during short periods).
- In Tasmania, children may attend occasional care services on an ongoing basis, eg attending 2-3 sessions a week at Play Centres which provide programs for 3-5 yr olds or they may attend an occasional care service in a rural community which offers care 3 days a week.
- These services have significant scope to input into the cognitive development of children, and in Tasmania, these services are licensed with Licensing Standards the same as those for Long Day Care services. Qualified staff are required.

#### *Draft Recommendation 8.2*

The current delivery of formal qualification training should be reviewed to ensure that current and future educators are supported in their knowledge and understanding of inclusive practice and what this actually means. Teachers engaged in teaching this unit should have recent experience in the sector either as a return to work strategy or be able to access support from the Inclusion Support Teams (needs financial consideration to ensure ISA's are reimbursed for professional support provided)

#### *Draft recommendation 10.1*

It is important to note that whilst the period of training and content may be largely satisfactory, delivery and robust assessment of competency continues to be an issue.

#### *Draft recommendation 10.2*

Agree so long as the English language training also includes literacy support.

#### *Draft finding 10.2*

Whilst agreeing that innovations are occurring we are waiting to see the employment evidence in ECEC settings other than schools

#### *Draft Recommendation 10.3*

- In Tasmania, RTOs currently do offer practical placements in the family day care setting and this seems to be robust and of sufficient quality.
- If FDC are expected to complete work placements in centre based settings, there should be a reciprocal arrangement where centre based staff undertake practical placements in FDC settings.
- Given that Schemes often also monitor these placements, and the anticipated additional audit requirements for the RTOs based on the recommendations in this document, MCCAC suggests that there be appropriate remuneration of this work and that the recommendation be reworded so that it doesn't just apply in situations where centre based training is difficult to facilitate, eg the

Recommendation could start with the words, 'Registered training organisations should offer ....' removing the words prior to this.

- Implementation would need to take into account circumstances where the Family Day Care Educator does not provide care for babies and therefore could not be assessed on that module.
- Practical placements need to be inclusive all work environments where qualifications are transferable to either LDC or FDC.

#### *Draft Findings 10.4*

- Although recognition has been included as a finding, MCCAC recommends that there should be a recommendation about this as well, eg that there be assistance to use recognition as an effective means of gaining a qualification for those educators who are able to demonstrate they have the appropriate skills and knowledge. However it is important to note that the use of recognition is not appropriate for all course components eg child development units (foundation).

#### *Draft Recommendation 10.4*

- MCCAC strongly agrees with the recommendation but queries who should pay? Is it the RTOs themselves, even though they will be obligated to undertake the program, or would the program be provided free of charge?

#### *Draft Finding 10.5*

Agreed as the actions proposed address many of the current training concerns.

#### *Draft Recommendation 10.6*

- MCCAC agrees with this recommendation and is hoping that the role of the ASQA will be much clearer than that of the previous system, thereby also providing a clear and transparent complaints mechanism. In the past it has been difficult for organisations to identify how to make a complaint about an RTO.

#### *Draft Findings 10.7 & 10.8*

These two findings are influenced by other workforce issues such as the commitment of educators to lifelong learning and budgets (PD is usually at the bottom of the list). Currently within Tasmania there are many opportunities for PD including specific customised service support but take-up is reliant upon the services' attitude, resources and commitment to ongoing learning.

#### *Draft Recommendation 10.8*

- Point 2 is particularly relevant to FDC as educators may not be aware of after-hours professional development to support the inclusion of children with additional needs or CALD backgrounds, particularly where there is no ability for the inclusion support program to fund relief educators in either LDC or FDC while the professional development is being undertaken.

#### *Draft Recommendation 10.9*

- It seems a little unusual that the Report would make a recommendation about government funding in this manner.
- It should be noted that in Tasmania, teachers in a school settings, including kindergartens (preschools under the NQF) are required to be registered. This would also apply where a child care service becomes registered as a school in order to provide a recognised kindergarten program. It is now possible for eligible teachers working in all ECEC settings to obtain registration.

#### *Draft finding 14.8*

Funding for this can be currently accessed through the PSC's and the Bicultural Support program.

## Other Comments

Page 95 – 6.2 Effect of the NQS on demand for family day care workers.

- There is concern that Cert III may be seen to be the top qualification for Family Day Care educators. Consideration needs to be given to incentives for educators to gain higher qualifications in the longer term, even though the initial focus will be on this sector obtaining Cert III. Many Family Day Care Educators in Tasmania have a Cert III and others already have a Diploma or are working towards it.
- Incentives need to be intrinsic and educators supported and encouraged to continue on their professional learning journey.

Page 163 – Key Points for Training the early childhood education and care workforce.

- Agree with the second last dot point re internet based professional development. In the family day care sector, educators are engaging with web services such as Facebook (needs to be credible and professionally managed) where they are finding valuable resources, rather than with more formal avenues of professional development.
- Services are utilising more online training opportunities, however, face to face still has a place in some circumstances for example for consolidation of learning and/or undertaking of practical assessment

Page 164 – 10.1 Qualifications and the quality of early childhood education and care.

- The statements in the last paragraph appear to be a little too broad-brush and perhaps also do not reflect the experience level of educators.

Page 182 Box 10.5 Concerns about the quality of vocational education and training in early childhood education and care

- These concerns are valid and are experienced in Tasmania.

It is recommended that the Productivity Commission read the Family Day Care Development Research Project conducted by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council when it becomes available as there are some actions that relate across both pieces of work. There may be other related information from other organisations which has been completed and is available.