



ECD Workforce
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2 Collins Street East
Melbourne Vic 8003

30 August 2011

To whom it may concern,

The Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC) is the peak body for 380 Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria. Neighbourhood Houses are the largest providers of occasional child care in Victoria: an estimated 52% of ANHLC member organisations are licensed to provide occasional child care. In making this brief submission in response to the *Early Childhood Development Workforce Draft research report*, we confine our comments to issues related to the occasional child care workforce.

ANHLC wishes to endorse comments made in the submission by the Community Child Care Association of Victoria (CCC) regarding the occasional child care workforce, notably in sections 3.3 and 5.2 of the CCC submission.

ANHLC concurs that there is no case for any education and care setting to be exempt from minimum mandatory qualifications; and ANHLC supports mandatory qualifications for the occasional care workforce as is the case under the Children's Services Regulations in Victoria.

As noted in the CCC submission, "occasional care educators need significant skills, knowledge and experience in the care and nurture of infants and very young children, and because of the lack of consistent primary care and peer relationships, a continuing need to settle children into an unfamiliar setting for short periods of time and to participate in a group whose members are constantly changing."

"Occasional care is a significant provider of respite care for parents, with an accompanying significant role for occasional care educators in family support.

"By its nature, occasional child care is particularly challenging and needs very capable and skilful educators to provide a quality experience for children and families."

In May 2010, of the 127 occasional child care providers who responded to a survey conducted by ANHLC:

- 96% said people with low incomes used the service
- 70% said people with low levels of formal education used the service
- 63% said people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities used the service; and
- 53% said people with disability used the service.

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By far the most common reason given for utilising the occasional child care service was for social development of the child; this was the case for 86% of providers.

These factors—the complex needs of communities accessing occasional child care and their overwhelming preference for the service to support social development of the child—support the case for occasional care workers to have mandatory qualifications.

ANHLC strongly disagrees with the Commission’s draft recommendation 7.2, which suggests occasional care has relatively limited scope to contribute to cognitive development. In many small rural communities in Victoria, occasional child care is the only centre-based care available to local families. In some cases, occasional child care is the only formal care children receive prior to starting school.

The experience in Victoria is that occasional care providers can make the transition to mandatory qualifications for their workforce, given reasonable transition times and support to assist with the compliance process. ANHLC suggests lessons learned from the Victorian experience could be applied more broadly in this regard.

Kind regards,

Angela Savage
Executive Officer