

Response to the Productivity Commission's Early Childhood Development Workforce Draft Report



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Recommendations

1. That community management must be recognised as contributing to the capability of communities through the gaining of new knowledge and skills that is shared and used elsewhere in the community. Therefore CCSA contends it will be important to develop models that retain the benefits of community contribution, participation and influence.
2. That the Government must effectively implement a support framework to build the capacity and support access to ongoing professional development in management and leadership for ECEC services.
3. That Draft Finding 3.2 and 3.1 are correct but the systemic issues outlined need to be a That community management must be recognised as contributing to the capability of communities through the gaining of new knowledge and skills that is shared and used elsewhere in the community. Therefore CCSA contends it will be important to develop models that retain the benefits of community contribution, participation and influence.
4. That the amounts committed by Governments to ECEC funding and support to services are reviewed in relation to the outcomes of the Productivity Commission's report.
5. That as staff need to respond to a curriculum this demonstrates the need for trained and capable people to facilitate the outcomes determined. Though the type of qualification may need to be more varied it is important that tertiary trained staff are guiding the development of experiences and activities for children.
6. That as children learn in all settings and the EYLF outcomes are for all children, there should be suitably qualified staff in occasional care rather than creating a 'second tier' of services where a lower standard is accepted. To not have staff with such training seems to be at odds with these outcomes and Recommendation 8.2.
7. That the Government provides appropriate funding to train all existing and future staff to support quality outcomes for children with additional needs. This includes funding for additional resources.
8. That the Government also provides additional funding to employ additional staff where children with additional needs are accessing ECEC services.
9. That where there is a specific additional need that the Government funds the ECEC service to employ staff with specific skills or knowledge to support that child.
10. That additional supported university places with those institutions already set up for this purpose are provided to meet the demand for higher education qualifications for teachers.
11. That, in support of Draft Finding 10.8, technological solutions such as online training packages should continue to be explored as a means of facilitating support networks.

1. About CCSA

CCSA is a peak body that aims to facilitate quality outcomes for children through the provision of integrated management, industrial relations, governance and operational support to children's services.

CCSA has been operating for more than 42 years and has a strong knowledge of the issues faced by children's services in rural, remote and regional areas. We run an annual program of regional training including forums and workshops and consultancies on specific issues faced by children's services. CCSA has a strong base of knowledge and experience in these regional areas, a close relationship with its member services and a continuing commitment to regional and remote NSW. Currently CCSA has 600 members across NSW.

CCSA also operates Business Solutions, which provides accurate and timely payroll and bookkeeping services.

CCSA plays a leadership and advocacy role at a state and national level in order to:

- Advocate for high quality and affordable early childhood education and care services
- Encourage the government to be responsive to this sector's needs
- Increase in community awareness about the value of qualified early childhood professionals
- Increase the understanding and importance of community managed services
- Promote effective workplaces

2. Introduction

CCSA welcomes the Productivity Commission's Draft Report on the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce. This report is both necessary and timely in relation to the implementation of the National Quality Agenda and COAG reforms.

CCSA maintains that a workforce development strategy will benefit from recognising the specific knowledge and skills needed at all levels of service delivery in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector.

It is important that workforce development responds to contemporary knowledge and practice in ECEC. This knowledge recognises that children learn and develop continuously from the time they are born so that all care settings must provide skilled and knowledgeable staff to support this development.

CCSA has made specific responses to some of the recommendations in the report below.

3. Response to Draft Recommendations and Findings

3.1 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'.

CCSA agrees that in certain circumstances cluster management or shared services can be a very effective structure for ECEC services particularly those that are smaller and/or in regional/remote locations. It is also true that services in metropolitan areas can have the same or similar difficulties regarding the obligations and responsibilities of the role of voluntary committees. CCSA argues that this decreased capacity has its origins in systemic failures which have occurred more gradually over time in part due to the reduction in support from government for the leadership and management role in concert with the increased obligations on the role itself.

The lack of capacity regarding management and leadership is also a significant contributing factor in relation to on-site managers (usually educator trained) having little opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to take on the role of operating a small business either through undergraduate training or professional development.

In our original submission CCSA noted that it is our experience, after over 40 years of supporting governance and management of ECEC services in NSW, that the need to support management and leadership occurs more broadly than just community management. It also exists in private and corporate structures, religious and local government operated services.

However CCSA contends that it is essential to identify the benefits that community management provides, over and above learning outcomes for children, before recommending an approach that may see the loss of these benefits to communities. These benefits include community development, increasing social capital and capacity building, all of which lead to improving the overall health and wellbeing of communities.¹ These are identified as being important for children and families in *'Belonging, Being and Becoming'* (the Early Years Learning Framework).

The experience of cluster management, though it has made improvements in some areas, has not necessarily removed the problems facing services in relation to governance, management and leadership. CCSA believes contributing factors have been:

- the lack of appropriate funding to support services moving to this model and its continued operation (KPMG Review of Kindergarten Cluster Management, 2007)² and
- the lack of understanding of ECEC services as unique to other businesses. Economic models of funding and operation will not facilitate the educational and social outcomes required of the sector.

The KPMG report (2007) states:

'A lack of emphasis on strategic planning within individual clusters may impact on the ability of the cluster to evolve to meet future service delivery and community needs, ensure the continuing viability of services within the cluster, and continue to add value to the delivery of kindergarten services. There is a risk this may adversely impact on the adaptability and sustainability of individual clusters. A lack of emphasis on strategic planning may also contribute to a reduced capacity to achieve broader cluster management objectives including linkages, coordination and integration with early years planning processes and other services.'

¹ Hadley F and Hayden J, *Social capital, Participatory management and Community development*, Children First Inc., University of Western Sydney, 2005, p.5.

² KPMG, *Review of Kindergarten Cluster Management*, 2007, p.65.

The KPMG report also notes:

'There are opportunities for cluster managers to improve in relation to:

- ensuring appropriate Board/ governance group oversight of cluster operational decisions and activities;*
- implementation of relevant governance documents, particularly for federated and amalgamated cluster managers;*
- transferring knowledge regarding governance roles and responsibilities where regular Board turnover is experienced, and training of new Board members; and*
- proactively accessing existing resources and advice to support good governance.*

Community managed services and other governance structures are capable of operating well if a structural framework is provided by government which recognises the importance of effectiveness governance and management as a driver for the National Quality Agenda's objectives.

Recommendations

1. That community management must be recognised as contributing to the capability of communities through the gaining of new knowledge and skills that is shared and used elsewhere in the community. Therefore CCSA contends it will be important to develop models that retain the benefits of community contribution, participation and influence.
2. That the Government must effectively implement a support framework to build the capacity and support access to ongoing professional development in management and leadership for ECEC services.
3. That Draft Finding 3.2 and 3.1 are correct but the systemic issues outlined need to be addressed to support a workforce that can facilitate quality outcomes for children.

3.2 Draft Recommendation 3.2

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

CCSA acknowledges that through the National Partnership Agreement a total of \$970m will be injected nationally into the ECEC system, to June 2013, to support the implementation of universal access to services. However, as noted in the Productivity Commission's report ECEC *'fees are expected to increase as a result of implementing NQA requirements, as well as ongoing cost rises'*.³

While some services nationally have access to the Child Care Benefit in NSW state funded preschools and many mobile services cannot access the Child Care Benefit as it is only applied to 'approved' services. In NSW preschools in particular high fees need to be charged to compete with other service

³ Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce: Draft Report*, June 2011, <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/education-workforce/early-childhood/draft>, viewed 9 September 2011.

types such as long day care that are able to provide Child Care Benefit to ameliorate the cost of ECEC. This has seen an increasing number of preschools close or reduce the number of staff to minimums to be able to compete on price.

Recommendation

4. That the amounts committed by Governments to ECEC funding and support to services are reviewed in relation to the outcomes of the Productivity Commission's report.

3.3 Draft Recommendation 7.1

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

Though OSHC has a recreation foundation it is wrong to suggest there is no cognitive component to the experiences planned and implemented with children, particularly when there is often considerable consultation with children in this regard. Reference to the OSHC curriculum "My Time, Our place" supports this position.

Recommendation

5. That as staff need to respond to a curriculum this demonstrates the need for trained and capable people to facilitate the outcomes determined. Though the type of qualification may need to be more varied it is important that tertiary trained staff are guiding the development of experiences and activities for children.

3.4 Draft Recommendation 7.2

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

Occasional Care in NSW has an important role in providing education and care for children, for respite (for children with additional needs) as well as supporting parents who work part-time, casual or seasonally and others for medical and family reasons. It can also regularly be a bridge to more formal ECEC settings. In NSW many children attend regularly rather than occasionally particularly children whose parents work part-time or have settled casual work arrangements.

Recommendation

6. That as children learn in all settings and the EYLF outcomes are for all children, there should be suitably qualified staff in occasional care rather than creating a 'second tier' of services where a lower standard is accepted. To not have staff with such training seems to be at odds with these outcomes and Recommendation 8.2.

3.5 Draft Recommendation 8.2

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.

CCSA argues that it is appropriate to provide existing trained staff with additional training and resources to support quality outcomes for children with additional needs. This would include funds to employ additional workers whose role was to assist with the implementation of learning experiences for all children. This would target funding towards those educators who have established relationships with children with additional needs and their families and better reflect contemporary inclusive practice.

However CCSA also acknowledges that in some instances it is essential to have staff with a specific skill or knowledge about a specific additional need in order to ensure that all children are able to participate equitably in ECEC services.

Recommendations

7. That the Government provides appropriate funding to train all existing and future staff to support quality outcomes for children with additional needs. This includes funding for additional resources.
8. That the Government also provides additional funding to employ additional staff where children with additional needs are accessing ECEC services.
9. That where there is a specific additional need that the Government funds the ECEC service to employ staff with specific skills or knowledge to support that child.

3.6 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.

CCSA reiterates its opposition for teacher training to occur at the VET level. The EYLF indicates clearly that effective pedagogical leadership is required for quality outcomes to be achieved and indicates university trained teachers are critical in this process. The ambition of the National Quality Agenda is to increase quality. Though it may seem convenient to use RTO's in relation to supply it will be a better outcome overall to provide additional supported university places with those institutions already set up for this purpose.

We would add that teacher training for primary and secondary level education does not occur at VET level and ECEC teachers should be viewed in the same way. This finding seems at odds with Draft Finding 5.1 re salary and conditions as it is likely to contribute to a devaluing of university trained teachers. Refer also to page 50 and Box 4.1 (p52) where the draft report refers to the importance of university trained teachers to the implementation of the NQA.

Recommendations

10. That additional supported university places with those institutions already set up for this purpose are provided to meet the demand for higher education qualifications for teachers.
11. That, in support of Draft Finding 10.8, technological solutions such as online training packages should continue to be explored as a means of facilitating support networks.

4. General Comments

In Chapter 4 of the draft (and particularly Box 4.2) there are attempts to unpack the reasons for low wages in the sector. CCSA contends that the reasons for this are:

- competition in the market and
- the lack of knowledge generally in the community and by policy makers of the value of learning for children in ECEC and therefore the value of educators. This is an issue the NQA attempts to address with an increased knowledge and understanding being part of its stated ambition.

Strong competition for places/enrolments exists in locations where there are a healthy number of services available. This places pressure on the prices charged which simultaneously place downward pressure on expenses, particularly in lower socio-economic regions. Significant parts of the sector become price sensitive and it is often thought to be difficult to differentiate an individual service or operator as high quality in a market where parents have difficulty discerning quality or are forced to choose on price. As staffing is often the highest operating expense there is economic motivation to keep to or as close to award rates in a market that regulates outputs (total numbers of children) where other markets do not.

This has arisen by a long term government approach that allows the market to regulate itself, but economic approaches do not align well with educational and social outcomes. A shift in thinking is required that accepts that economics, whilst a critical consideration, is the means by which we can realise the quality improvement vision rather than an end unto itself.

There is also very little knowledge in the sector in relation to employment relations generally which leads to a limited ability to address these issues. It is common to have ill-informed perspectives or false assumptions in this regard which often means remedial strategies are ineffective. Government commitment to address these fundamental issues is required to effect real improvements that will drive the outcomes espoused by the NQA.

5. Conclusion

CCSA welcomes this report by the Productivity Commission and welcomes the opportunity to contribute. The early childhood education and care workforce is an essential part of achieving quality outcomes for children under the NQA. However management committees and leaders are also essential in providing leadership to services to enable workers to achieve these outcomes. All parts of the ECEC workforce must be appropriately resourced, supported and funded if the NQA is to be implemented effectively and achieve its goals.