

My comments are in response to the draft report released 30 June 2011. I realise that these comments may come too late for inclusion in the final report.

My comments relate to the issue of training the early childhood workforce, and in particular relates to university-based training.

Whilst the report comments that generally there appears to be satisfaction with the quality of training provided by tertiary providers, what is overlooked is the looming crisis in terms of the aging of the academic workforce. There is already a desperate shortage of appropriately qualified staff who are ready and able to transition to an academic role. The minimum requirement of a PhD for employment in a university creates a barrier that is discriminatory in a workforce that is a) predominantly female; b) that is predominantly low-paid and c) largely unqualified. As it stands, there are simply not enough 'up and coming' academics who can meet the standard of a PhD that is the minimum entry requirement of a university. In South Australia, where the early childhood academic workforce has an average age of over 60 and where there are virtually no experienced early childhood educators with PhD's to take their place, the crisis is not just around the corner – it is already being felt.

The other issue is that for those with tertiary qualifications, an academic pathway is not necessarily a desirable one. Academics at Level B (the usual entry point) typically earn less than a preschool teacher or Director on the top of their salary scale (for which they do not require a PhD). Likewise, far higher salaries can be earned either within government departments or within the private sector – both more desirable options where a PhD is not an essential requirement.

Whilst people might be satisfied with the current training that early childhood educators receive in universities, it would be interesting to compare the professional experience of those who currently work in universities with those that aspire to work in universities. The shift from teaching colleges to universities means that the undergraduate-honours-PhD pathway has the potential to build a future academic field (but at this stage one that is insufficient to replace the current number of academics) but many of these people will be without field-based experience. This creates a tension – academics who can research and publish and met the expectations of the university, but academics with no first-hand experience in early childhood education and with no first-hand experience of the system that students are required to work in.

This is a major issue and needs close scrutiny. South Australia is a good case in point, where the shortage of quality academics in early childhood education is already having effect. Equally so, universities may need to shift their ideas and approach so that they take on the role of 'building' an academic workforce – by investing in those who have the potential to have an academic career but do not currently possess the qualifications that would enable them to do so.