
7 The outside school hours care workforce

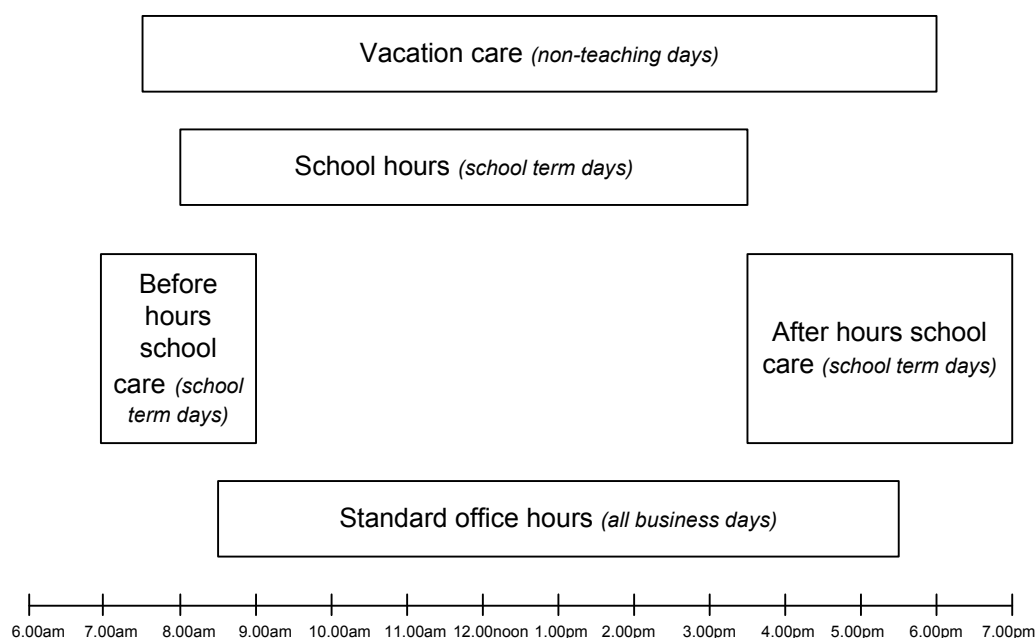
Key points

- Outside school hours care (OSHC) is a major component of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, caring for over 340 000 children through approximately 5300 services and employing roughly 30 000 workers.
- Demand for OSHC services results largely from families who require child minding services to meet work commitments.
- OSHC has been growing strongly for a sustained period of time.
 - Demand for OSHC is significantly influenced by parents' work commitments, and whether their extended household is capable of providing informal care.
- Broadly speaking there are two groups of OSHC employees — directors and coordinators who manage and lead OSHC services, and OSHC educators who provide care services directly to children.
 - Directors play an important leadership role in the OSHC workforce and will be important in ensuring that OSHC services are able to implement the Framework for School Age Care in Australia — 'My Time, Our Place'— which is included in the National Quality Framework (NQF).
- Flexible working arrangements and relatively low barriers to entry have seen the OSHC workforce meet growing demand for OSHC services. Employers require a workforce that can work flexible and variable hours on a casual or seasonal basis.
- The OSHC workforce has higher rates of part-time and casual employment than the rest of the ECEC sector, with workers less likely to hold an ECEC qualification, but with a high degree of professional development.
- OSHC is better suited to the holistic development of children through constructive play and socialisation, rather than school-like education. This is reflected in ECEC employers' preference for OSHC educators who are able to meet part-time and casual working arrangements, rather than workers with ECEC qualifications.
- Though mandatory qualification requirements for all OSHC workers may improve the quality of OSHC services, such requirements will also increase recruitment and retention pressures faced by OSHC providers. More cost-effective approaches to improving OSHC quality include limiting qualification requirements to OSHC directors and coordinators.

7.1 Outside school hours care

Outside school hours care (OSHC) is a major component of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, providing 30 per cent of all approved ECEC services (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data). OSHC services include before school care, after school care and vacation care. OSHC services vary greatly with respect to timing (figure 7.1) and are commonly provided to children in centres at, or close to, primary schools (COAG 2009h).

Figure 7.1 **Opening times for outside school hours care, vacation care and occasional care**



Source: Productivity Commission estimates based on public submissions, consultations and DEEWR (2008).

Though included in reforms to the early childhood sector, OSHC is considered to be a middle childhood service providing services to children of school age. Within OSHC services 98 per cent of children are aged between 5 and 12 years; of these 50 per cent are between 8 and 12 years of age (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data).

There are approximately 5300 providers of OSHC services in Australia (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data). Government and community-run centres constitute 60 per cent of these service providers, with the remaining 40 per cent being private for-profit providers. However, the proportion of private for-profit providers has grown rapidly,

increasing from 11 per cent of the total in 2004-05 to over 40 per cent in 2009-10 (SCRGSP 2011a).

Government funding for OSHC is largely via the child care benefit and the child care rebate. Additional government assistance is provided by local government, which supplies some facilities to community-run OSHC services (appendix E). The increase in direct government funding, through the child care benefit and the child care rebate appears to have driven the strong growth in private for-profit OSHC providers.

OSHC services are currently regulated by state governments which stipulate staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements. This commonly involves more than one Act and multiple agencies (table 7.1). While national standards for OSHC were proposed by the 1995 Community Services Minister's Conference, these standards are not binding. Instead, they were intended to act as a catalyst for future nationally consistent provision of OSHC, and provide a minimum level of regulation of OSHC (COAG 2009h). Previous reviews of the ECEC sector have noted there was significant overlap and duplication in OSHC regulatory arrangements (PC 2009a). Additional motivations to provide a nationally consistent set of OSHC regulations include:

- a perception that national regulation would improve the standing of the OSHC sector (Cartmel 2007)
- concerns that OSHC is oriented around parents' needs rather than childrens' needs for development
- concerns regarding inconsistent regulatory arrangements
- the welfare of OSHC employees
- the streamlining of present regulation (PC 2009a).

OSHC services form a higher proportion of Indigenous-focused ECEC services than in the rest of the ECEC sector, and account for a large proportion of Indigenous child participation in ECEC services (chapter 14). Further, OSHC forms more than half of Indigenous-focused ECEC services in remote and very remote communities (table 14.4), as well as those in the Northern Territory and Queensland (table 14.2). Indigenous-focused OSHC and enrichment programs offer a range of services including supervised care, organised activities, homework centres and nutrition services (DOFD 2008). High participation rates of Indigenous children in OSHC may be due to the attractiveness of the suite of services offered, particularly to those children in remote areas with high levels of disadvantage. High participation rates may also be due to the less regulated nature of some OSHC services, such as those

in the Northern Territory (appendix F), that currently place no restrictions on staff-to-child ratios.

Table 7.1 Existing regulation of outside school hours care^{a,b}

<i>State</i>	<i>Overview</i>
NSW	OSHC services in New South Wales are required to register with Community Services, an agency within the NSW Department of Human Services. Providers are required to supply information about the provision of the service if requested by Community Services. Development of operational requirements for OSHC services is proposed as part of a second stage of regulation.
Vic	Victorian OSHC providers are required to be licensed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development under the <i>Children's Services Act 1996</i> and the <i>Children's Services Regulations 2009</i> . These regulations require OSHC staff to meet minimum training requirements as well as having effective communication mechanisms and policies.
Qld	Child care centres in Queensland are regulated under the <i>Child Care Act 2002</i> and the <i>Child Care Regulation 2003</i> . The Department of Education and Training is responsible for administering these regulations through the Office for ECEC. Under these regulations, childcare services that cater for seven or more children, including care-based services, are required to be licensed.
SA	Childcare centres in South Australia are regulated under the <i>Children's Services Act 1985</i> and the <i>Children's Services (Child Care Centre) Regulations 1998</i> . Stand-alone occasional care services are required to be licensed under the Act, but OSHC services are not licensed or regulated unless they are OSHC services provided on South Australian Department for Education and Child Development property. In this case they are required to meet the national standards for OSHC as a condition of use of the facilities. OSHC services operating on Catholic Education and some other private school sites are also required, by policy, to meet the national standards.
WA	OSHC in Western Australia is regulated by the <i>Child Care Services Act 2007</i> and the <i>Child Care Services (Child Care) Regulations 2006</i> , as well as the <i>Child Care Services (Outside School Hours Care) Regulations 2006</i> and <i>Child Care Services (Rural Family Care) Regulations 2010</i> . The Western Australian Department for Communities is responsible for administering these regulations with OSHC services required to be licensed.
Tas	The Child Care Unit at the Department of Education is responsible for administering the <i>Child Care Act 2001</i> . This Act requires centre-based OSHC to be licensed, including specifications for OSHC services to maintain staff-to-child ratios of 1:15 for school-aged children.
NT	The <i>Care and Protection of Children Act 2007</i> and the <i>Care and Protection of Children (Children's Services) Regulations 2009</i> provide the overarching legislative framework for ECEC services in the Northern Territory, with the Department of Education and Training responsible for their administration.
ACT	The <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> requires OSHC service providers in the ACT to be licensed and is administered by the Children's Policy and Regulation Unit, a section of the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support within the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

^a Further details of regulation governing the ECEC sector is provided in appendix F. ^b The requirements necessary to be classified as a qualified staff member are detailed in the relevant jurisdictional Acts.

There is little formal research concerned with the OSHC sector, relative to the rest of the ECEC sector. Though OSHC is included in data collections for the ECEC sector, such as in the 2010 National ECEC Workforce Census conducted by the

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), there is little scholarly research in areas such the effectiveness of OSHC services and determinants of OSHC quality (NOSHSA, sub. DR356; OSHCsa, sub. DR363; Queensland Children’s Activities Network, sub. DR357).

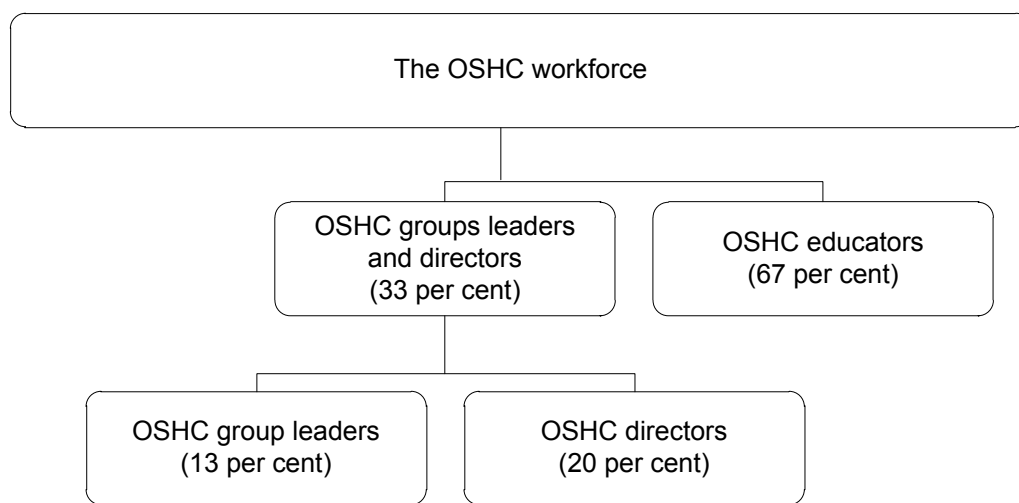
The outside school hours care workforce

The current OSHC workforce includes approximately 30 000 individuals, making up 20 per cent of ECEC workers (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data).¹ Within the OSHC workforce there is extensive part-time or casual employment, with only 10 per cent of workers being in permanent full-time employment (CSMAC 2006; Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data). The OSHC workforce also has low rates of tertiary qualifications, with almost half of the workforce possessing no post-high-school qualification (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data). However, there is a significant shift towards employer-provided professional development for OSHC employees, with over 70 per cent of employees undertaking in-service professional development each year (Cassells and McNamara 2010).

As with the ECEC workforce more broadly, it is possible to identify two broad groups within the OSHC workforce, one consisting of directors and coordinators and the other consisting of OSHC educators (figure 7.2). Though there is some overlap in the work that each group undertakes, they also have distinctly different roles and responsibilities. Commonly, directors act as leaders of OSHC services, coordinating OSHC educators, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements and conducting program planning. Coordinators are also involved in providing program planning, but manage OSHC educators directly. OSHC educators are also involved in program planning, but the primary focus of their role is on implementing the program directly with children. In some cases, a number of roles may be fulfilled by the same person. For example, a small OSHC centre may have one person fulfilling the role of both director and coordinator.

¹ Study participants considered that DEEWR census data underestimates the OSHC workforce as it is unable to account for the large number of itinerant and casual staff working in the sector (NOSHSA, sub. DR356).

Figure 7.2 The outside school hours care workforce^a
By employment type



Source: Cassells and McNamara (2010).

^a These numbers exclude additional non-contact staff employed, for example, as cooks, cleaners, bookkeepers. As these workers are not included in the terms of reference for the Early Childhood Development Workforce study, they have not been included.

Reflecting these different job requirements and responsibilities, directors and coordinators are more likely to hold post-high-school qualifications and receive higher wages than OSHC educators. They are also more likely to work on a permanent full-time basis in order to complete administrative tasks after opening hours.

Many OSHC educators chose to work in OSHC due to its casual, temporary, part-time or seasonal hours, as these arrangements enable them to meet other commitments (Rolfe 2005). Study participants suggest that there are two significant groups of OSHC educators: young working mothers who find employment in OSHC convenient as it allows them to meet family commitments; and university students who work in OSHC as it provides a source of income while they study (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, sub. 65; OSHCsa, sub. DR363; Queensland Children’s Activities Network, sub. 84).

OSHC employers revealed that they experience significant difficulties recruiting workers into vacant OSHC positions. OSHC employers reported receiving few applicants for advertised positions, noting that it was difficult to find people able to fill the two and three hour shifts before and after school hours that are a feature of the sector (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359; NTOSHC Association, sub. DR362; OSHCsa, sub. DR363). These difficulties create a constant set of pressures on OSHC service directors (NTOSHC Association, sub. DR362).

Study participants also raised the pay and conditions of OSHC workers as a concern. Many study participants considered that OSHC workers are underpaid, even relative to the rest of the ECEC sector, suggesting that remuneration levels do not make it possible to have a lasting career in OSHC. Also of concern to study participants was the lack of time allocated for OSHC educators to undertake the planning and documentation required by regulation (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359; NTOSHC Association, sub. DR362; NOSHSA, sub. DR356).

How is OSHC different from other forms of ECEC?

The OSHC sector is considered to hold a unique position among other ECEC services as it works with children of school age, emphasising child development through leisure-based activities rather than school-based education. This includes a range of activities aimed at facilitating constructive play and socialisation for children, recognising the importance of social interactions and recreation (OSHClub 2011).

OSHC's unique emphasis is largely a result of its history which saw growth oriented around the needs of parents rather than children. OSHC services initially emerged in the early 1900s to provide child-focused recreation services. However, this focus shifted towards the needs of parents in the 1970s, when the provision of childcare was seen as an important mechanism for supporting increased female labour participation (Blau 1995; Moyle and Evans 1997). Subsidies were paid directly to parents, replacing direct government funding of OSHC centres, meaning that strong growth in OSHC services orientated around the needs of working parents rather than the developmental needs of children (Cartmel 2007). This attitude persists, with parents' need to work accounting for 88 per cent of the demand for OSHC services (Cassells and McNamara 2010).

OSHC services are gradually reorientating around the needs of both children and parents, with greater emphasis on child development. This transition is based on new discoveries in child development (section 4.1) which is embodied in the National Quality Framework.

The OSHC sector is focused on promoting holistic child development through leisure-based activities that involve constructive play and socialisation for children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. Rather than focusing on formal education, OSHC provides leisure-based care focused on the development of socio-emotional skills such as perseverance, motivation, and the ability to interact with others. These socio-emotional skills assist children when they undertake formal education, and

explain differences in educational and life outcomes between adults (Heckman 2006). In this regard they are crucial to early childhood development and are enhanced by a diverse range of activities including music (Music Council of Australia, sub. 51 and sub. DR214). A discussion of the different aspects of child development is in appendix C.

There is also limited scope for OSHC's ability to provide child development through school-like educational services that focus primarily on core cognitive skill formation. Due to the nature of OSHC services as a supplementary service to formal schooling, many children attending OSHC have formal schooling on the same day. There is some concern that additional intensive education may overload children, causing stress, anxiety or both (NOSHSA, sub. DR356). The scope for educational services is limited further by the fact that children only spend on average six hours per week in OSHC (ABS 2007a).

Given OSHC's emphasis on holistic leisure-based development, many OSHC employers do not consider it necessary for all workers to hold high-level ECEC qualifications (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359; NSW Government, sub. DR326; NTOSHC Association, sub. DR362; OSHCsa, sub. DR363; Queensland Children's Activities Network, sub. DR357). Study participants reported a preference for a mixture of qualified and unqualified OSHC educators from a variety of backgrounds, as they feel that exposure to such a diverse pool of people is an important component of a child's development and essential to service quality (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359).

7.2 Changes in the outside school hours care sector

OSHC has experienced strong growth, with 4 per cent per annum increases in the number of children attending between 2002 and 2006 (Cassells and McNamara 2010). OSHC has been responding well to these increased demands, despite recruitment difficulties, with average staff-to-child ratios remaining constant at around 1:12 during the same time period (Cassells and McNamara 2010), while attracting a workforce dedicated to providing quality OSHC services (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359).

New demand for OSHC appears to have been met due to the following factors:

- a flexible OSHC workforce — characterised by high rates of casual and part-time employment, especially among unqualified OSHC educators who fill seasonal and casual positions

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- low qualification requirements limiting barriers to entry for those employees wishing to work in ECEC only for a short period of time
 - high levels of in-service professional development to increase the effectiveness of workers
 - strong growth of private OSHC providers
 - regulatory barriers which are low relative to the rest of the ECEC sector
 - socio-demographic changes (DEEWR, sub. DR301)
 - changes in parental work patterns (DEEWR, sub. DR301).

Given the opening hours of OSHC services, part-time and casual employees filling OSHC educator positions are a particularly important source of flexibility for OSHC. The low barriers to entry which these workers experience contribute to OSHC's effectiveness and its ability to meet parents' need for OSHC services. They are also attractive to OSHC educators, who gain satisfaction from being able to pursue other life opportunities (Rolfe 2005).

7.3 What will the COAG ECEC reforms mean for outside school hours care?

The National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care, adopted by COAG in 2009, will introduce the first nationally consistent regulatory framework for ECEC services (chapter 3). Under the new regulatory framework there will be no changes to existing staff-to-child ratios or staff qualification requirements for OSHC services (COAG 2009h). However, OSHC services will be subject to the new ratings system introduced as part of the National Quality Framework (NQF) (chapter 3). Given their responsibility for leadership, directors will play an important role in the implementation of this new ratings system.

The NQF includes the Framework for School Age Care in Australia (FSAC), called 'My Time, Our Place' (DEEWR 2011n). The FSAC supports and provides guidance to educators working with school-age children in OSHC (DEEWR 2011n) (box 7.1). It is intended that the FSAC will:

ensure that children in school age care will have opportunities to engage in leisure and play-based experiences which are responsive to the needs, interests, and choices of the children attending the service and contribute fully to their ongoing development. It will support and provide guidance to educators working with school age children in outside school hours care, long day care, and family day care settings. (DEEWR 2011u)

Box 7.1 The ‘My Time, Our Place’ Framework for School Age Care in Australia

‘My Time, Our Place’ is the Framework for School Age Care in Australia (FSAC) and is designed to ensure that children receive high-quality school-age care experiences. Educators of school-aged children will use the FSAC to work with children and their parents, viewing children as active participants and decision makers while identifying programs that build upon childrens’ interests and abilities. Within the FSAC, developing life skills and a sense of enjoyment are emphasised, with the aim of promoting quality experiences for rich learning, personal development and citizenship opportunities. This is achieved through supporting spontaneous play and leisure experience initiated by children (DEEWR 2011n).

The FSAC consists of three inter-related elements — principles, practice and learning outcomes — which provide educators with a foundation for pedagogy and decision making, helping to guide their interaction with children (so as to promote opportunities for belonging, being and becoming.) The principles reflect contemporary theories and research evidence on school-aged care and underpin practice which is focused on making progress towards five outcomes that children:

- have a strong sense of identity
- are connected with and contribute to their world
- have a strong sense of wellbeing
- are confident and involved learners
- are effective communicators.

These outcomes are designed to capture the integrated and complex wellbeing, development and learning of children. They include that children.

The FSAC will come into effect under the National Quality Standard as of 1 January 2012. Outside school hours care providers and other providers of school-aged care, including long day care and family day care, will be required to demonstrate their use of the FSAC in the design and delivery of programs. The transition to the FSAC will be strengthened by a range of support materials which are currently being developed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR, sub. DR301)

Source: DEEWR (2011n).

While further regulation of OSHC may be desirable for increasing quality, such regulation also runs the risk of limiting the sector’s ability to respond to future increases in demand. In particular, the imposition of additional staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements risks the creation of labour shortages, particularly among OSHC educators where difficulties in recruitment and retainment are a significant burden for many OSHC directors. OSHC is responding well to strong

increases in demand due to its flexible workforce with low barriers to entry, high levels of internal professional development and increased private sector provision.

Further, given that OSHC is suited to promoting children's development through leisure-based activities, rather than school-like activities, it is not necessary to require all OSHC workers to obtain ECEC qualifications (Community Connections Solutions Australia, sub. DR228; Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359; NSW Government, sub. DR326). As discussed in appendix D, many countries do not require all OSHC workers to hold significant formal qualifications, nor do they impose stringent staff-to-child ratios. Instead, these countries recognise that the nature of OSHC is suited to providing recreation, leisure and care services which support childrens' development.

7.4 Qualifications for the outside school hours care workforce

Generally speaking, additional ECEC qualifications can improve the quality of care provided in OSHC. For example, Burchinal, Howes and Kontos (2002) conclude that caregivers level of education is a better predictor of quality than group size or adult-child ratios (appendix C). In fact, mandatory qualifications for all OSHC workers were seen as desirable by a number of study participants (Australian Community Children's Services, sub. DR153; Child Australia, sub. DR168; Community Child Care, sub. DR212; Early Childhood Australia (NSW), Early Childhood Australia (NSW Branch), sub. DR190; Early Childhood Teacher Education Council NSW, sub. DR162; Hume City Council, sub. DR325; North Coast and Southern Cross University, Early Childhood Education Unit sub. DR176; NOSHSA, sub. DR356; Tasmanian Ministerial Child Care Advisory Council, sub. DR173).

However, just as in the rest of ECEC, requiring all employees to hold additional qualifications will likely exacerbate existing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. This may be more pronounced in OSHC, than elsewhere in ECEC. Such requirements for additional qualifications would be particularly damaging for the recruitment of OSHC workforce where a relatively large component of the workforce are employed in part-time and casual work. In fact, many OSHC educators that fill three-hour shifts while pursuing higher education may leave OSHC altogether if required to obtain qualifications. This may result in some OSHC services having to shut down, or breach existing state and territory regulations.

Study participants recognised the costs involved in mandatory qualifications across the OSHC workforce.

The implementation of a mandatory qualification for all staff is unmanageable and unable to be sustained within the OSHC sector in NSW. Ultimately the imposition of a mandatory qualification could result in the driving down of quality [rather] than raising it. We caution against a system that has staff employed for their qualification rather than their ability to relate to children and create positive environments where they can spend their leisure hours. (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359, p. 4)

Many participants did not believe that additional mandatory qualification requirements are necessary or feasible, and there was also particularly strong opposition to the imposition of a certificate III ECEC qualification for all of the OSHC workforce (Government of South Australia, sub. DR337; Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359; NTOSHC Association, sub. DR362; NSW Government, sub. DR326; OSHCsa, sub. DR363; Queensland Children's Activities Network, sub. DR357).

Despite limited jurisdictional qualification requirements, many OSHC workers already hold qualifications, with 48 per cent of OSHC workers holding some ECEC qualification and 36 per cent studying towards a higher qualification (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished DEEWR data). Even in New South Wales where OSHC is regulated lightly, 60 per cent of staff are qualified despite services relying heavily on a casual workforce made up of tertiary students, freelance artists, sportspeople and actors (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359). Professional development is also high in OSHC with 77 per cent of workers undertaking relevant in-service training (Cassells and McNamara 2010). This suggests that even unqualified educators' competency is being improved significantly.

Requiring all OSHC workers to hold additional ECEC qualifications may also be undesirable for the delivery of higher quality OSHC if it forces OSHC workers to leave the sector. A variety of OSHC educators with different life experiences is considered desirable, as it is viewed as the child's first exposure to the community (Network of Community Activities, sub. DR359; NOSHSA, sub. DR356). OSHC educators with a broad set of skills and qualifications in areas such as sport and recreation, health, education, music and art are also desirable (Music Council of Australia, sub. 51 and sub. DR214; OSHCsa, sub. DR363; Queensland Children's Activities Network, sub. DR357).

One solution to the risks imposed by across-the-board qualification requirements in OSHC is requiring only ECEC qualifications to be held by OSHC service leaders, such as coordinators and directors. While there was no broad agreement from study

participants as to qualification requirements for all staff, there was a broad consensus that there needed to be at least one member of an OSHC service that is able to fulfil the role of pedagogical leadership, coordinating the FSAC and its implementation, especially when working with casual or transient educators (Community Connections Solutions Australia, sub. DR228; NOSHSA, sub. DR356; NSW Government, sub. DR326; OSHCsa, sub. DR363; Queensland Children’s Activities Network, sub. DR357). Such an approach could involve innovation in the management models used in OSHC, including the centralisation of administrative tasks (Queensland Children’s Activities Network, sub. DR357).

Alternative approaches to improving the quality of OSHC include supporting the provision of professional development opportunities for educators. There is already a high rate of professional development in OSHC, meaning that such approaches have the advantage of not imposing additional costs on OSHC services and avoiding the creation of barriers to entry.

The imposition of higher staff-to-child ratios in OSHC may increase the quality of services. However such regulatory changes would also be expected to exacerbate recruitment and retention difficulties in OSHC. In many cases, this would cause centres to ration their services, either through price increases or by reducing the number of available places for children.

FINDING 7.1

Outside school hours care focuses on holistic child development through constructive play and socialisation. Outside school hours care is also dependent on casual and part-time staff. As a result, the imposition of additional qualification requirements, or new binding staff-to-child ratios, will likely increase difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining staff. Such changes risk decreasing the number of services available while increasing their cost and decreasing their quality.

RECOMMENDATION 7.1

Given the nature of outside school hours care, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements or binding staff-to-child ratios.