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Submission to the Productivity Commission – Early Childhood Development Workforce Study From the Victorian Children's Services Association (VCSA)

The VCSA is an employer organisation, founded in 1978, and is specifically for the non profit children's services centres. Our members are Occasional Child Care Centres, Outside School Hours Care Services, and Children's Centres integrating Long Day Care and Kindergarten. We provide a telephone advisory service on all matters relating to awards, salaries and the employment of staff.

This submission is brief. We have however, contributed to and agree with the Submission of Community Child Care Victoria.

We enclose for your interest the Executive Summary and Recommendations of the 1996 Child Care Workforce Attrition Study. (We note it is not mentioned in your references).

Very little has changed in the fifteen years since that study was done. If anything the staffing shortage has become worse and the training of staff has deteriorated dramatically with the proliferation of private enterprise Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The quality of both Certificate 3 and Diploma graduates is so bad that many Children's Services Centres have fewer staff than they would like, rather than employing someone who is so poorly trained as to be a danger to the children – e.g. leaving a baby unattended on a change bench.

Many centres have adopted the practice of using trainees and thereby, in effect, training their own staff.

With particular reference to the Diploma of Children's Services it is the opinion of our members that more Child Development Theory should be in the course.

Professional Status of the ECD Workforce.

At our 2010 Annual General Meeting the issue of status resulted in a lively discussion.

All were agreed status was a problem and only improvement in the Diploma will improve status. One participant said "the status will not be raised while they continue to have rubbish qualifications".

Leadership

We agree there should be a course to equip people for leadership and management roles in the centres.

Lessons from other sectors and countries

In Victoria the Kindergartens had central payment of staff for many years. This is the ideal and is the system in many European countries. In Australia with child care funding to parents from the Federal Government and generous funding from the State Government in the form of a per child subsidy (in Victoria) integrating the two systems would be a major challenge.

Rosemary Waite

One behalf of the Committee of Management

31.1.2011



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**Childcare Workforce
Attrition Study**

**A research project funded by the
Department of Human Services**

PROJECT CONSULTANTS:

Malcolm Rosier & Jan Lloyd-Smith Survey Design & Analysis Services Pty Ltd

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This project was jointly funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services and the Commonwealth Department of Health & Family Services to examine and explain the apparently high levels of attrition from the occupational workforce of qualified child care workers from centre based child care, and to propose strategies to address the attrition. A secondary objective of the project was to develop growth scenarios for the future demand for child care and the supply of graduates in order to determine whether there will be sufficient supply to meet the demand in the future.

The project has involved a number of people besides the consultants and the staff of the Community Services & Health Industry Training Board. Without the willing participation of the Long Day Centres and their staff, training institutions including staff from Student Records, other agencies and former workers in the occupational workforce of the sector, this study would not have been possible.

The study builds on previous research projects undertaken by Baker & Robertson (in South Australia and Victoria) and Whelan (in New South Wales). During the course of the project other research was undertaken by Richard Curtain of Curtain Consulting for the Economic Planning Advisory Commission and the consultants are indebted to the EPAC for providing access to the results prior to publication.

PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP:

Mr Shane Brown, Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Mr Mike Debinski, Pre-School & Child Care, Department of Human Services
Ms Clare Forbes, Child Studies and Health, Swinburne University of Technology
Ms Mardi Hatherell, ALH & MWU
Ms Petra Hilsen, East Melbourne Child Care Cooperative, Powlett Reserve Community Centre representing the Child Care Coordinators Association
Mr Anthony Hynes, Victorian Private Child Care Association
Mr Brian McFarlane, Child Care Centres Association of Victoria
Ms Sue Picot, Community Services & Health Industry Training Board (Minute Secretary)
Mr Peter Quick, Department of Human Services & Health
Ms Rosemary Waite, Association of Subsidised Child Care Centres
Ms Julie Weste, Education Liaison Unit, Department of Human Services
Ms Liz Wright, Community Services & Health Industry Training Board (Chairperson)

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Community Services & Health Industry Training Board, 1996

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Foreword

The Community Services & Health Industry Training Board (CS&H ITB) was established on 1 January 1996 when the Health ITB (H ITB) and the Social & Community Services ITB (SACS ITB) were amalgamated. The CS&H ITB continues to ensure that training is more responsive to the needs of industry through its annual research and planning process that culminates in the production of the Industry Training Plan (ITP).

In the course of preparing the SACS ITB Industry Training Plan in 1994, the industry sector identified that there appeared to be a high rate of attrition of qualified child care workers from Long Day Care centres and expressed concern that in a rapidly growing industry, there would not be sufficient qualified staff to meet the demand for child care. The grounds for their concerns were based on difficulties experienced by employers attempting to recruit qualified staff as well as the research findings of a study conducted by Baker and Robertson in South Australia and Victoria.

In 1995 the SACS ITB received funding from Health & Community Services Victoria (now the Department of Human Services) and from the Commonwealth Department of Health & Human Services (now the Department of Health & Family Services) to conduct the project to determine the attrition rate of qualified child care workers compared to other occupational sectors with a two year training course and a similar gender and age composition. There were no industry benchmarks to compare the findings with and there were none available in other industries. Therefore, one of the outcomes of this study has been the establishment of a benchmark for this occupational category in the community services industry.

As well as identifying the level of attrition, the project consultants were required to identify the reasons for attrition of the qualified staff and to develop strategies to address the attrition. In the course of determining the level of attrition, the consultants identified a high rate of turnover. While turnover is not a direct loss to the industry, there is an indirect loss in terms of costs to the centres which may lose experienced qualified staff; many centres expressed difficulties in recruiting qualified staff with sufficient experience. However, the findings of this study in relation to why staff leave indicate the importance of best practice in human resource management and the recommendations point to important considerations for proprietors and managers in terms of their management practises.

The consultants were required to develop growth scenarios predicting the future demand for child care places and to determine whether the current rate of qualifying child care course graduates from TAFE colleges would be sufficient to meet the demand in the future. The growth scenarios, based on different assumptions, have been developed using Australian Bureau of Statistics population data and data from the Department of Health & Family Services concerning the proposed expansion of child care places over the next few years. The industry can be confident of the supply requirement scenarios for 1997 and 1998, unless there are significant policy changes that affect the ratio of qualified staff to children or socio-economic changes that affect the demand for child care. However, beyond 1998 the scenarios are based on guesstimates.

In the Federal Government Budget handed down in August 1996, changes to child care subsidies are proposed to be introduced at the start of the next financial year. This may affect demand for child care as well as the level of provision of places through subsidised centres, however, it is difficult to predict the extent of the impact of these policy changes on demand for places and hence the level of requirement for graduates.

The ITB is committed to quality training for the community services and health industries in order to enhance efficiency in the workplace and the effectiveness of the workforce. The findings of this study include the reasons why people leave the occupational workforce sector. Apart from feelings of being under-valued as professionals by the community, one of the main reasons people leave is due to stress in the workplace caused by expectations of management in relation to conditions of work such as being required to attend meetings outside working hours, being responsible for more children than is allowed under the legal ratios and not having adequate non-contact time in which to plan programs for children. One of the outstanding results is the love of children that staff bring to their work. While it is recognised

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that there are a number of considerations that drive parents choice of care for their children, some of the reasons for selecting a Long Day Care centre are the standards of care and programs and the quality of the facility, however, it can be assumed also, that a loving environment where there is staff harmony is an equally important factor guiding parent choice.

In the course of conducting the research for this project, a number of comments were made in relation to the training of child care workers particularly in relation to relevant experience of teaching staff in TAFE Institutes. The relevance of child care education is dependent on practical components gained through meaningful placements within the industry sector however, it is equally dependent on staff having broad and recent experience within the industry and recommendations of this report address this issue.

Finally, the Board sincerely thanks the industry representatives on the Project Reference Group for their valuable advice and assistance to the consultants throughout the project. I also want to express my appreciation to all the Long Day Care centres, managers and staff and the Institutes of TAFE involved in training in the Associate Diploma and Diploma of Community Services (Child Care), that participated by survey and interview as part of the research sample. Without the assistance of the child care centre staff it would have been almost impossible to reach qualified child care workers who have left the industry. The TAFE Institutes Student Records staff dispatched questionnaires to graduates and without their assistance the task of the consultants would have been made all the more difficult. Also my thanks to Monash University, RMIT Coburg campus and the University of Melbourne (Kew) involved in teaching the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) and the Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Teaching for providing information about the numbers graduating in 1994 and 1995 and expected to graduate in 1996. Numerous other staff attached to agencies provided input to the project in a variety of ways. Your assistance in the provision of information and editorial input has enabled the consultants to present a report of high standard, and the Board appreciates your efforts.

This foreword does not take into account all of the recommendations of this report. The other recommendations, which are just as important as those I have mentioned, should be read in the context of the report. I am sure that you will find the report as comprehensive and informative as I have done and I commend the consultants, Project Reference Group and CS&H ITB staff on their efforts.

I have no hesitation in recommending the report to you.

Brian Spencer ✓
Executive Director



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study arose due to industry concerns about the rate of attrition of qualified centre-based child care workers and whether the supply of qualified staff would be sufficient to meet the expanding demand for child care. These concerns were reported by the then Social & Community Services Industry Training Board (SACS ITB) in its Industry Training Plans in 1992, 1993 and 1994. Subsequently, Health & Community Services Victoria and the Commonwealth Department of Human Services & Health jointly funded the ITB to undertake the study. The aims of the study were to:

- substantiate the level of attrition against industry benchmarks
- examine the reasons for attrition
- develop scenarios for child care demand and graduate supply growth
- recommend strategies to ensure an adequate supply and retention of qualified staff in this rapidly growing industry sector.

The study has shown that while turnover is high, 40% of workers changed jobs during 1995, this is consistent with findings from other research in relation to this occupational workforce sector. However, the rate is over 100% higher than that found by Baker and Robertson in their 1991 study of Long Day Care centres in South Australia and Victoria. It is also higher than the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data about female labour force mobility in the para-professionals, sales persons and personal service workers category (20%) although the research questions are not directly comparable between the ABS and study data. The rate of attrition (11%) found by this study is not considered especially high compared to other industries, however, the lack of appropriate and relevant industry benchmarks in Victoria, or other States, qualify this conclusion. The difficulties experienced in replacing qualified staff loss from individual centres through turnover and attrition is a major concern of centre management.

Four key factors were attributed to attrition of qualified staff:

- general dissatisfaction with the management of the centre and the working conditions
- the extra effort required over and above their normal paid hours and conditions
- stress as indicated by a lack of preparation time away from children and a heavy administrative load
- low pay and low status relative to the high level of responsibility inherent in the job.

These factors can also be considered to have some bearing on the rate of turnover. The other crucial factor attributed to turnover is that in a rapidly expanding industry sector, in which the number of new centres established since 1991 has almost doubled, real employment alternatives are opened up. The study found that child care workers generally enjoy their work, gaining satisfaction from observing the development of children however, their criticisms of centre management and the regard in which the community holds child care workers, as reflected in their perceptions of their professional status and level of remuneration, are significant in relation to attrition and turnover. Attrition and turnover will be reduced if staff find it easier to do the job they enjoy doing.

Since 1991, the large increase in the number of places in Long Day Care centres has mainly occurred in the private sector, and virtually all future growth will be in private centres. The study predictions of growth in the number of places available are all based on assumptions about the extent of unmet demand for places, levels of Government subsidies to parents or centres, and the net cost to parents of placing their children in child care. Two recent developments have the potential to modify the assumptions. The recent Budget proposes to change the levels of child care subsidies which, in particular, will have greater impact on community based centres as they will lose their operational subsidy. Further, the *Children's Services Bill 1996* which transfers responsibility for licensing of centres to the State Government includes provisions that will have an impact on the extent of the regulatory role of Government. However, it is too early to assess the full impact of these changes.

In terms of assessing whether the supply of qualified child care workers is likely to be adequate to meet the demand, the study examined course throughput and graduate destinations. The main qualification for a child care worker is the TAFE Diploma of Community Services (Child Care). The study estimates that after approximately 80% of the 1996 TAFE graduates proceed to work in child care centres in 1997 there will

still be a shortfall of qualified child care workers. Some of the shortfall may be made up of graduates of degree courses in early childhood education however, most of these graduates seek employment as preschool teachers. After taking account of attrition of qualified staff from child care centres, an estimated 750 staff will be needed in 1997. The supply of TAFE and tertiary graduates appears to be lower than the number of staff needed. Assuming that any shortfall in 1997 is met, a further 959 staff will be needed in 1998.

The recommendations of this research project are directed to the various industry parties to ensure that the future supply of qualified staff will be adequate to meet future demand for child care. Recommendations for achieving this are directed at strategies to address the reasons underlying the attrition and turnover of qualified staff from the sector, as well as issues associated with the quality and accessibility of training.

The Community Services & Health Industry Training Board (CS&H ITB) is committed to training delivery by the TAFE sector being accessible to industry. There are high costs to employers associated with backfilling in order to release untrained child care workers for study leave. It would enhance the supply of qualified staff and the opportunity of retaining experienced workers in the industry if the flexible delivery options currently available were increased. Recommendations that will enhance training delivery and ensure the supply of qualified staff to meet future demand have been made.

There will be increased expectations of the sector to undertake a more regulatory role through professional associations in order to ensure that centre proprietors and/or managers establish appropriate management practices and standards of care.

The findings of the study point out that the reasons for leaving the sector (in relation to attrition) are also relevant to turnover. If management concerns in relation to the costs of replacing staff are to be addressed the industry sector needs to take greater responsibility for ensuring that centre management has appropriate human resource management skills. The Children's Services Bill 1996, currently before Parliament, transfers licensing responsibility to the State Government and formal controls will, to some extent, remain with the Government.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services census of child care centres should include information about staff turnover and attrition.

Recommendation 2

That the key industry sector parties recognise the dissatisfaction of workers in the industry and explore mechanisms for assessing child care work value comparable to other industries.

Recommendation 3

That the various employer and industry associations take a more proactive role in the professional development of their members, especially in addressing concerns related to the management of centres raised in this report.

Recommendation 4

That centre managers introduce induction procedures for new staff.

Recommendation 5

That centre managers implement regular staff appraisal procedures.

Recommendation 6

That centre managers develop a staff development program that encompasses all staff.

Recommendation 7

All centres should be encouraged to belong to an association of centres

Recommendation 8

That the Department of Human Services, prior to licensing a new proprietor, encourage the proprietor to participate in an approved course in human resource management.

Recommendation 9

That the CS&H ITB give a high priority to the support of management training in the child care sector in the 1996 Industry Training Plan.

Recommendation 10

That the value of non-contact time be recognised by the child care sector and that the key industry sector parties develop ways to ensure that non-contact time is implemented by centres.

Recommendation 11

That the sector define an alternative term to 'child care worker' that better reflects the level of responsibility of qualified staff.

Recommendation 12

That the industry adopts a more proactive approach to informing the public about the work and level of responsibility involved in the long term care of young children.

Recommendation 13

That qualified child care workers be encouraged to join an association that provides a forum for discussion about their work by means of journals, seminars, conferences, workshops, etc.

Recommendation 14

That the CS&H ITB work with the Office of Training and Further Education to identify funding options for industrial release of TAFE teachers into the private sector, and that training institutions involve relevant staff/proprietors in their child care training delivery.

Recommendation 15

That training providers utilise a full range of training modalities and provide greater access to

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the application process for recognition of prior learning.

Recommendation 16

That training providers adopt more flexible delivery and assessment procedures in order to further enhance work place based delivery, and training on-the-job and off-the-job.

