

28 January 2011

To Whom It May Concern

Thankyou for the opportunity to put forward comment on the Early childhood Development (ECD) workforce study.

Please find our submission prepared by the Children's Service section of AlburyCity Council. We have addressed responses to areas 5 and 6 within the issues paper.

### **Future Demand for ECD Workers**

New qualification requirements, whilst in many ways will improve the quality of services provided for children, may also diminish the regard services have for many in the workforce who over many years of hands-on experience, demonstrate a real understanding of children and their needs.

It would be detrimental to the strong relationships developed by anyone working with children and families if current industry workers were to feel undervalued and would exacerbate a 'divide' we are trying to reduce.

In our experience it has been increasingly difficult to recruit and retain ECD workers. Whilst we understand the part regulations play in the provision of quality children's services, the proposed National Quality Standards in relation to staffing qualifications in particular Early Childhood Teachers (ECT) it be will be even more difficult to recruit and retain ECD workers.

### **Options for funding more highly qualified ECD staff.**


Our experience has been increased fees to parents. With the introduction of the new 1:4 ratio in NSW for children 0-2 years parents incurred a fee increase that was equal to a \$4 per day.

AlburyCity proposes that there needs to be Federal/State funding that is available to all services (not parents) such as the old Operational Subsidy. This would allow these higher costs to be absorbed by the service providers, not the parent.

We would also argue that there must be equity between stand-alone pre-school funding availability and what Long Day Care (LDC) is eligible for.

### **Supply of ECD Workers**

As previously mentioned our experience is of having difficulty recruiting and retaining ECD staff. This is despite the Albury Campus of Charles Sturt University (CSU) providing a highly sought after and successful Bachelor of Early Childhood course. Whilst CSU has difficulty placing all its practicum



students each year, the number of graduates that enter early childhood on completion is very low. Anecdotally this is put down to vastly inferior working wages and conditions. Why would you enter a early childhood environment such as a LDC centre or a Family Day Care Scheme and work 40 hours per week, 48 weeks a year for approximately \$45,000 when you could work less hours, have more non-contact time, holidays and be paid more in a preschool or primary school setting? This is the main reason for the difficulty in recruiting and retaining ECD staff.

Whilst the NSW Children's Services Regulations 2004 require and set out the need for ECD staff within a long day care centre, the training that ECD people receive at university does not have a strong focus on children under five years of age. There appears to be a huge gap to what is actually being taught and what is expected in a long day care setting. It is our belief that early childhood courses that are offered at university place more emphasis on teaching in a school setting.

Through having university courses that only focus on 0-6 years we believe it would assist in recruiting and retaining staff in long day care settings. Serious debate we believe is required to further explore this.

The choice of stand-alone pre-schools in the ECD sector as career of choice is obvious as conditions of employment (but not wages) are similar to colleagues of like qualifications in the primary sector. LDC does not provide comparable conditions and is last on the list of career options.

### **Regulatory Burden**

At present it appears that dealing with one regulatory body, not two, will make it easier for Early Childhood services. After reading, implementing and piloting the National Quality Framework (NQF) we feel that further clarification will be needed.


There is a huge regulatory burden placed on all qualified staff in any ECD service. This is increased because we are under Local Government which then has its own layer of regulation and requirements.

Here is an example. Under the current NSW Children' Services Regulations 2004, regulation 83 **Emergency and evacuation procedures**, the regulation for fire drills is to cover every child in a service. In reality that means 20 fire drills per year are required. Is this quality care?

Whilst it is understood that services need to be prepared for the possibility of fire the regulation does not necessarily provide increased safety and does at time severely interrupt the quality of care being provided.

### **Qualifications and Career Pathways**

Our experience is that newly qualified staff have the understanding required but there is still a lot to learn in relation to the regulatory requirements and day-to-day experiences. They need ongoing support and mentoring in order to retain them.



The pathways between TAFE and University need to be strengthened with Diploma Staff being able to access **easily** a cheap, supported and accessible transition to higher qualifications which fully recognises their prior learning and experience.

The cost and workload (whilst already working) is a disincentive to many would-be ECD staff. The sector will not be able to meet demand for 3-year and 4-year trained staff until this is addressed.

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