

Submission by the Tasmanian Government

Productivity Commission

Inquiry into the Early Childhood
Development Workforce

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Tasmania
Explore the possibilities

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Kindergarten	3
	2.1 Demand	3
	2.2 Supply	3
	2.3 Early Childhood Specialists in Child Care Centres	4
3	Child Care Centres	5
	3.1 Demand	5
	3.2 Supply	6
4	Child Health	9
	4.1 Demand	9
	4.2 Supply	10
	4.3 Effect of national health reforms.....	11
5	Integrated service delivery	11

1 Introduction

The Tasmanian Early Childhood Development (ECD) workforce is primarily split between the delivery of kindergarten, child care and child health services. As such, the Tasmanian Government's submission to the Productivity Commissions public inquiry into the ECD workforce has been framed to explain the different demand and supply issues facing each of these sectors with a particular focus on the challenges of meeting the requirements of the recent national reform initiatives.

2 Kindergarten

2.1 Demand

Tasmania is unique in the fact that for the past 40 years there has been a universal state-funded kindergarten service. Kindergarten has become widely acknowledged by parents as the 'first year of school', with more than 96 per cent of eligible children enrolled in kindergarten each year. Because of this demand, kindergartens are located wherever there are government and non-government schools. As such there is a high demand for qualified ECD teachers in Tasmania.

2.2 Supply

2.2.1 Regulatory change

- o Qualifications

It is difficult to predict the impact that the ECD regulatory changes will have on the availability of qualified kindergarten or ECD teachers. Currently university enrolments/graduates are sufficient to meet the demand of the sector. However, as a result of the reforms Tasmania will be required to have approximately 180 additional ECD teachers to fill the required places in child care centres (this issue is discussed in more detail below).

2.2.2 Professional Acknowledgement

- o Wages

Kindergarten teachers are part of the broader school setting and are subject to the same pay structure as the rest of their school colleagues (whether they are part of the Government education system or independent school system). Importantly, they have a larger body of support when negotiating pay and award structures which makes it arguably more likely that they will be able to negotiate a wage more equal to the work they do in comparison to their colleagues in child care centres for example.

- o Conditions

Kindergarten teachers enjoy the same leave, professional support and professional development opportunities as all other teachers in the education system. They are entitled to leave over the school holiday periods and have the support of the school principal and broader community of teachers when dealing with difficult issues relating to students/parents and the curriculum for example.

In addition, teachers employed by the Department of Education in Tasmania are employed in accordance with the provisions of the *State Service Act 2000* and Federal and State industrial awards and agreements. These awards and agreements are the source of salaries, allowances and other conditions of employment.

- o **Status**

ECD teachers in kindergartens are viewed as education professionals and are a part of the education system. By comparison ECD teachers currently employed in child care centres may not even be recognised as teachers and may simply be providing a care role.

2.2.3 Portability

- o **Qualifications and experience**

ECD teachers are university qualified and as such, depending on the extent of their qualification, may be eligible to work in lower or upper primary school and can freely move in and out of the child care sector (subject to the availability of suitable positions).

Due to there being a limited number of kindergarten positions available each year some recently qualified ECD teachers may be 'forced' into the child care sector to gain some practical experience in the industry as they wait for a position in a school to open up.

- o **Recognition**

As ECD teachers require a university qualification they are more likely to be regarded as education professionals than their counterparts working in the child care sector. While child care workers may be viewed by some as baby sitters and possessing no real qualifications, ECD are viewed as having developed an understanding of child brain development and behavioural patterns making them better equipped to teach.

While there is generally a greater understanding within the community of the importance of ECD teaching in forming foundation for life-long learning there are still some that regard the teaching methods employed by ECD teachers as glorified play and their job as an easier teaching option.

2.2.4 Demographics

ECD teachers in the kindergarten setting tend to be female and relatively young.

2.3 Early Childhood Specialists in Child Care Centres

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and School Age Care will, from 1 January 2012, introduce compulsory national standards for early childhood care. This includes learning frameworks, higher staff-to-child ratios and higher qualification requirements for ECD staff.

One of the major changes for ECD workers will be the requirement for child care services to recruit and retain qualified ECD teachers, in particular, centres with more than 26 children will be required to have one full time ECD teacher on staff. Tasmania will need approximately 180 additional early childhood teachers to meet the new regulatory requirements.

It is difficult to predict whether there will be enough qualified ECD teachers to meet the increase in demand. Current university enrolments coupled with a recently proposed post-graduate course with the university to transition qualified primary school teachers into ECD indicate that there should be sufficient numbers of qualified teachers to fill the positions. However these numbers will be tempered by the wages and conditions in child care centres as opposed to those received in schools.

While the full impact of this change on staff is not yet known, it is anticipated that teachers working in child care centres will receive a lower salary than those located in schools. ECD teachers currently employed in kindergartens are part of the education system and receive the same wages and conditions as other teachers, however teachers employed in child care facilities will not necessarily have the same protections and conditions. The larger centres may be able to afford to offer comparative wages to schools however it is unclear how the smaller providers will be able to afford to attract and retain staff.

It is likely that teaching in child care centres will be seen as an entry level position by recently graduated teachers, a way to gain some practical experience to make them more employable in the school environment.

3 Child Care Centres

3.1 Demand

The demand for child care workers is clearly linked to the demand for the service. Once viewed as a service for the 'privileged', it has over time become an essential service with parents coming to acknowledge both the socialisation and educational benefits of child care.

The number of children enrolled in child care, either on a full-time or part-time basis is dependent on a number of factors including: female workforce participation; cost of the service; location and flexibility of the centre.

Female workforce participation in Tasmania has remained relatively steady from 1999-2010, rarely exceeding 50 per cent (refer to Table 1 below). In addition, not all women who re-enter the workforce post childbirth use child care facilities, some are relying on extended family for child care assistance.

Female workforce participation: Table I

	Unit	1999	2000	2001	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Females with children aged 0–4(a)	%	43.3	46.2	r47.7	r42.3	42.3	r49.3	45.7	r51.7	r50.4	47.3	52.3	53.0
Participation rate - females	%	49.7	50.5	50.6	50.1	50.7	51.5	52.4	54.3	53.9	54.5	55.2	56.0
Females employed part-time – of total females employed	%	r50.6	50.0	51.5	51.1	51.2	50.3	50.7	50.4	49.0	r49.7	49.3	51.9

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics; Cat.no.4102.0; Australian Social Trends, Data Cube, Work; Released 21 December 2010 - <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4102.0?opendocument>>

The cost of child care may far outweigh the benefit of women re-entering the workforce post childbirth. Child care centres operate as businesses (even not-for-profit providers must break even) as such costs will vary between providers as too will the service they provide. Affordability of childcare is reliant on the costs of the care options available relative to the net income they gain from working. If the cost of the care either exceeds or is on par with the income from returning to work there may be little benefit in placing the child into care. While some parents may be entitled to access the Child Care Benefit and/or Child Care Rebate payments, this may not be sufficient to subsidise the cost of care.

The location and services provided by child care centres is largely driven by demand. As many centres are businesses they will only be established in locations where there is a clear and constant demand.

It is expected that the early childhood sector will be faced with more children, a greater need for flexible services and further fluctuations in the number of children in the different age ranges which will need to be managed. Whilst it is anticipated that there will be reduced numbers of younger babies in care there may also be some workplaces where the mother is reluctant to, or unable to, take leave for a longer period of time so this cohort will need to be continually provided for.

It is likely that due to the higher rates of children in part-time care in Tasmania that the early childhood workforce will become increasingly casualised to enable businesses to respond flexibly to the demand for the services.

3.2 Supply

3.2.1 Regulatory change

o Qualifications

The child care sector in Tasmania has experienced difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff. To address this problem in the short term an approvals process has been created to approve staff without formal qualifications to work in qualified positions. Currently there are 147 approvals in place for staff without formal qualifications to work in a qualified position.

The decision by the Council of Australian Governments to increase the qualifications and staffing levels in child care facilities was based on evidence suggesting that this would improve the quality of the service and outcomes for children. As a result of this decision the demand for qualified staff is set to increase.

In some jurisdictions there may be an increased demand overall for qualified staff due to the changes in staff to child ratio. This issue is not as acute in Tasmania as, except for the 1:4 ratio, all the other ratios are currently in place and being met. While the demand for additional staff recruitment is not high, there will be a need to encourage existing staff to work towards attaining both Certificate III and Diploma qualifications. There is a risk that these additional education requirements may force some of the older/more experienced staff out of the industry. The flow on effect will be forcing new workers to take on greater responsibilities and leadership roles that they may not be equipped for.

While there are sufficient places with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to train child care workers there is concern with the level of applicant's attracted to these courses. Anecdotally, the child care sector is not attracting the 'right people' to actually complete the qualification in the first instance. There has been a trend in VET teachers and career guidance counsellors referring less able students to child care because it is seen as a 'nice thing to do' and not necessarily requiring a high level of intellectual capacity or skill. Many of these students struggle to complete the Certificate III requirements and are unable to obtain the Diploma qualification. The low wages and conditions are not attractive to those students who are looking for a well paid career with a clear career pathway in place. The sector then has difficulty retaining workers as they come to understand that the job is challenging and demanding and requires the attainment of formal qualifications.

In order for significant gains to be made improvements in the quality of the training employees receive (both theoretical and practical) are required. The focus needs to be on genuinely educating and improving the skill base of child care employees and not merely placing a tick or a cross next to a series of prescribed competencies. Child care workers need to be fully equipped to provide a high level of care and high quality educational opportunities to the children in their care.

3.2.2 Professional Acknowledgement

o Wages

Recruiting and retaining staff in the child care sector in Tasmania is further inhibited by the low pay rate for the industry. Wages are a key determinant in retaining staff and ensuring that they do not move to other industries or sectors. Currently, the sector is held together by the good will of early years professionals who struggle to deliver quality service.

As a first step towards addressing the current wage structure, the funding contained in the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate could be reviewed to see if the current payment systems are best able support the development of a quality system into the future.

- **Conditions**

Low wages, poor working conditions and the lack of a clear career path all contribute to staff turnover and dissatisfaction with the industry.

- **Status**

Historically people have not understood the importance of early childhood learning and development on later life chances and the opportunities to improve outcomes with quality programs for this age group. People believed that 'education' did not begin until school. There was also the perception that not many skills are required to perform this role (particularly because the entry level training for a child care worker is competency based and not through university studies) and that, as a predominantly female workforce, those skills that are required are naturally there – with the role being akin to child minding or baby-sitting. While in recent years there has been an increased acceptance of the importance of early childhood education the wage structure or qualifications for early childhood care service providers has not increased to reflect the attitudinal change.

3.2.3 Portability

- **Qualifications and experience**

Ideally, increasing the qualification levels of carers as well as attracting new and qualified staff into the sector will raise standards of quality and improve the status of the industry. This will bring about improved workforce conditions, including pay, in the child care sector. However, higher qualifications will put pressure on salaries, which will also impact on the cost of the service for families.

Many newly qualified workers in the child care sector in Tasmania feel that they do not have the necessary skills and attributes to be immediately effective in the workplace. There are many comments made about the inappropriateness of the competency based training and how it does not give educators the underpinning knowledge that they need to work in a professional manner. There are also variations between graduates from different RTOs. In addition, distance, transport or access to computers/on-line learning for those in smaller, less well resourced rural and remote services, may also be barriers.

There are always difficulties in back-filling for qualified staff, both in terms of cost and also in replacing them with a qualified person. This may get worse for a while with the increased number of educators who will be studying to meet the requirements of the national reform. In the long term it should be easier as it is anticipated that there will be a bigger pool of qualified people to call on.

Many of the older directors are leaving and are not always being replaced by staff with the appropriate skills and experience. Often once a person completes their qualification, they are placed in a position of leadership within the service without having the opportunity to watch and learn from those with more experience. They are then at risk of having difficulties in their leadership role, being overwhelmed and burning out. The more staff that are qualified in the service, the more options there are for succession training and support.

Currently there are some instances where differences in qualification requirements restrict workers' ability to move between jurisdictions and the early childhood sector. This, however,

should be resolved for the education and care sector with the implementation of the national reforms. There will still be people working in services that are currently not in the scope of the national reform so there may still be issues that remain for them.

For example, Tasmanian teachers are required to be registered with the Teachers Registration Board (TRB). Teachers in child care settings are not eligible for teacher's registration which will prohibit the possibility of them teaching in both child care and kindergarten. It should be noted that it is hoped the requirements of the TRB can be amended to include teachers in child care at some point in the future.

o Recognition

The lack of professional recognition for the sector continues to be a major issue in attracting and retaining staff. In order to retain staff in the sector a career structure needs to be developed that can take people from being unqualified to Certificate III, through to a Diploma and then to being a teacher, in addition there needs to be parity of wages and conditions across the sector.

The national reform should assist over time to increase the public's awareness of the professionalism of the sector. It is also important for educators to see themselves in a professional light, however this can be demoralising longer term without accompanying improved wages and conditions or external status recognition.

3.2.4 Demographics

Child care workers in Tasmania tend to be young, female, inexperienced and not highly qualified. With many of the more senior carers moving out of the industry due to reaching retirement age or not wanting to undergo additional training to meet the new reform requirements a lot of the junior staff are being required to 'step up' and fill more senior leadership roles within the centres.

4 Child Health

4.1 Demand

The demand for Child Health and Parenting Services (CHAPS) is largely geographically motivated. Anecdotally, parents in lower socio economic communities tend to rely more heavily on the services provided by CHAPS professionals. This is particularly so in times of 'crisis' often brought on by uneducated mums who have children with poor health outcomes and need extra support during the early years of their child's life. The number of children aged 0-4 in a community will also be an important factor in the demand for CHAPS services and therefore CHAPS specialists.

In addition, the Child and Family Centres being developed across Tasmania are expected to play a positive role in attracting families to CHAPS and other related services prior to families reaching crisis mode.

4.2 Supply

4.2.1 Regulatory change

o Qualifications

Most CHAPS nursing positions require a post-graduate qualification in child and family health nursing. This means that the entry age into the profession is higher than for general nursing which restricts the pool of potential workers. In addition, the further study required to be eligible for a CHAPS position does not necessarily equate to an increase in salary which may serve as a disincentive.

4.2.2 Professional Acknowledgement

o Wages

Recruitment is more difficult given that CHAPS cannot compete with hospital salary packaging conditions. The nurses most interested in working in CHAPS are historically more likely to come from midwifery and paediatric backgrounds (which are generally supported by large hospitals), are now withdrawing their interest/application when they discover salary packaging will not be possible.

o Conditions

CHAPS workers are required to work in a variety of settings and may not have access to the same equipment and services as provided in hospitals. The Tasmanian population is small and dispersed so most CHAPS nurses delivering universal services work alone or with other disciplines so often do not have the collegial support that nurses in hospitals experience.

o Status

While CHAPS workers are highly specialised and skilled professionals their position does not attract the same level of respect/status as their counterparts employed in the larger hospitals. There is a lack of understanding within the broader community about the precise job that they perform, and the level of qualifications that they must attain. This is particularly acute because they are mobile, forced to work with a variety of people from different disciplines and organisations and perform multiple functions.

4.2.3 Portability

o Qualifications and experience

There is limited opportunity for Registered Nurses (without a post-graduate qualification in child health) within the service. Currently these nurses can only work within the school screening and Wetaway programs (which only equate to approximately 1.6 FTE in each area). Most of these positions are fixed term contracts.

CHAPS is working with the University of Tasmania to develop a team approach to support undergraduates whereby a lead nurse acts as a preceptor and is supported by the rest of the nursing team to expose the student to a range of CHAPS activities.

4.2.4 Recognition

There is little recognition for the specialist service that CHAPS workers provide. For example, while some areas of nursing have implemented alternative positions (without or with lower qualifications) to registered nurses in an attempt to maintain service delivery at a reduced cost this is not an option for CHAPS activities. For example, child and family health nurses have knowledge and skills beyond those of registered nurses and are working with the most vulnerable subgroup of the population (ie the period when development and growth is the most rapid, the child clients are totally dependent on others for early identification, and the early years of childhood are an opportune time to intervene – maximising outcomes and minimising health spending).

4.2.5 Demographics

As at June 2010, 54 per cent of CHAPS nurses were over the age of 50 – with 13 per cent of these over the age of 60.

4.3 Effect of national health reforms

Under the National Primary Health Reform, child and maternal health services across Australia have been identified as a service that may undergo strong national reform or come under the Commonwealth for funding and policy direction. The decision as to whether CHAPS services will remain state controlled or move to the Commonwealth has not yet been finalised; although a decision is likely to be made early in 2011. It is unclear if movement to the Commonwealth will affect the current structure of the CHAPS workforce and/or their future work within state funded Child and Family Centres.

5 Integrated service delivery

The Tasmanian Government supports the Productivity Commission's view that adopting integrated models of service delivery will require leadership, new knowledge and skills and multidisciplinary professional networks. In order to successfully deliver integrated services we will need to consider training specialists integrated service managers to coordinate the diverse range of services.

Fully integrated services that go beyond linked, coordinated services or co-located services will require ECD practitioners to work in a very different way. Additional requirements include the need to develop greater leadership capacity at a whole-of-government level and a stronger performance culture which aligns pay and career structures with the achievement of outcomes. In addition staff will be required to develop a broader knowledge base across other specialities in order to know how and where to refer people to other services.

Approaches which focus on a shared understanding of objectives and foundational principles will minimise the risk of hardening professional boundaries, which may be an unintended consequence of an emphasis on individualised professional development and the attainment of higher qualifications.

As Tasmania is at the early stages of integrating services within our Child and Family Centres the full impact of introducing ECD workers into this type of environment is not yet fully understood.