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30 January 2009

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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
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**Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Committee
on
Inquiry into the provision of childcare**

The LHMU, Australia's childcare union, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into the provision of childcare in Australia.

The LHMU through our Big Steps in childcare campaign has been actively campaigning for reform in the childcare sector. We envisage a future childcare sector to be an educative, caring, supportive and stable environment for all Australian children and families.

Despite the best efforts of childcare professionals, many years of neglect by government has created a crisis in the care and education of young children. There is a chronic shortage of professional staff and a desperate need for national quality standards and career paths with better pay for workers in this important sector. Our expectation that childcare workers deliver a professional quality service from an unprofessional wage base is no longer tenable.

The LHMU commends the Australian Government on moves to reform the industry, and its backbone - the workforce, through its quality review and the COAG process.

In support of this submission please find enclosed as appendices the following documents;
Appendix A- Big Steps in childcare. A Universal Solution
Appendix B- Securing the best start for children
Appendix C - Securing the best start for children; Early Years Learning Framework

Louise Tarrant
National Secretary
LHMU – The Childcare Union

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"The move towards early childhood education and care brings with it an enormous potential for good... for the children themselves, enhanced and long-lasting development...integration and reduced disadvantage... for many millions of women, the erosion of one of the last great obstacles to equality...for many millions of parents, help, to reconcile the competing demands and pleasures of income-earning and family life...for national economies increase[d] GDP and public revenues, cut poverty rates, reduce[d] welfare budgets, and boost[ed] returns on public investments in education".¹

Executive Summary

1. Long term vision

This submission outlines a new philosophical approach to the provision of childcare in Australia, changing from a demand driven to a supply driven model. This model would be publically funded and publically supported bringing the provision of childcare more in line with the provision of schooling in Australia.

In making this submission we appreciate this is a long term goal requiring considerable public expenditure and a dramatic philosophical shift. It would also, we believe, require further research and modelling to ensure a robust sustainable and effective funding model be developed. We look forward to a publically funded and provided childcare industry of the future, an industry that dovetails with related social policy agendas such as a well supported and well paid parental leave.

2. Short term reform

The second part of this submission details some practical easily achievable goals for reform of the childcare industry. These are;

- 2.1 Workforce development
- 2.2 Introduction of a national planning system
- 2.3 Creation of a nationally consistent licensing, accreditation and regulation system
- 2.4 Public access to information

¹ UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre. *The child care transition. A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries.* Report Card 8, 2008.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Childcare provision in Australia is ready to be shifted away from a market driven approach towards more supply-side funding. This will require further careful investigation and planning.

The LHMU recommends that work, from a firm evidence base, be undertaken to develop financial modelling and a realistic implementation strategy to reform ECEC in Australia.

Recommendation 2

The LHMU submits that the Commonwealth and State governments should fund an early childhood career path built on a national classification structure and stepping up to a four year university trained ECEC professional. Training structures should support early childhood professionals to articulate between these classification levels through Commonwealth ECEC pathways scholarships which offer HECS subsidies and release time for study. Free VET training should continue to be bolstered by a National system of Recognition of Prior Learning for early childhood workers.

Recommendation 3

That a national planning system be developed to ensure childcare places are available where needed and are equitably available to all children.

Recommendation 4

The LHMU recommends that new, nationally consistent, licensing, accreditation, regulation and standards be developed. That these should;

- enforce evidence based minimum ratios and maximum group sizes developed by Early Childhood Australia

	Maximum ratio	Maximum group size
Under twos	1:3	No more than 9
Two to three	1:5	No more than 15
Three to five	1:8	No more than 24

- allocate four hours of non contact programming time per week to childcare professionals responsible for leading development programs with children
- include the following minimum standards
 - Inductions for new childcare workers
 - Staff rest periods and places: including tea/ bathroom breaks and rooms

- Cleaning, cooking and maintenance standards that require specific staff for these auxiliary functions to care and education
- Roster display of qualified staff in attendance
- Program preparation and planning time
- Public notification of licence acquisition and accreditation status

Recommendation 5

We recommend that information regarding licensing, accreditation and ownership be made publically available and easily accessible.

Introduction

Australia has an excellent historical base upon which to build a better and fairer system of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provision. We were the first nation to link funding to a mandatory quality assurance process. The LHMU commends the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) reform initiatives to the Committee and its proposals to:

- Consolidate and enhance public infrastructure for ECEC through the provision of 260 new centres. We particularly commend the Government on the community consultation process to ensure new centres are placed where they are needed. This is the first time in over a decade that community has been consulted in relation to need and location of new Centres.
- Provide national consistency and efficiencies by consolidating and streamlining the regulation of quality processes through a National Quality Framework, including the proposed Early Years Learning Framework for children from birth to school age.
- Extend universal access to education in ECEC settings *starting* with 15 hours per week for every Australian 4 year old including those living in rural and remote areas and in particular for Indigenous Australian children.
- Make better integrated and inclusive service models available to each child's parents and family (including pre and ante-natal wellbeing services) through the establishment of readily accessible and multi-disciplinary staff teams working in community hubs.
- Address the ECEC workforce instability, high turnover and predicted shortfalls of skilled practitioners in the sector through the provision of training incentives, HECS rebates and a professional registration board.

Now is also the time to emphatically abandon the divisive debate over the relative merits of children's care and education prior to school and embrace the conceptual framing of ECEC provision in economically advanced nations

as a 'transition' in progress.² A transition that flows from the increased recognition of children's and women's rights to greater social participation, and within which countries are shifting, in varied public policy trajectories, towards an optimum balance of work and family responsibilities for both women and men in parenting roles.

UNICEF's recent Innocenti Report Card 8³ provides a stark assessment of Australia's need for improvement on an internationally comparative scale. Recent corporate failures have given us further reason to rethink why we should undertake system wide reform on how this essential human service is publicly envisaged, funded and supported.

In particular the LHMU welcomes the Committee's willingness to take up a broader and more inclusive national vision for ECEC provision which it sees as foundational to the COAG reform proposals to improve the calibre of the Australian ECEC system for the benefit of all Australians. LHMU believes that the nation must invest equally in its support of ECEC staff and parents who both undertake the important but hidden work of raising children. We must invest in the capacities, skills and knowledge of a workforce that endeavours to nurture and develop these same aspects in children in the face of many barriers to professionalism.

The LHMU submits that reform of the current system starts by challenging market domination and is realised through supply driven funding models, workforce development and national consistency.

1. Long Term Vision

*"Any vision of society that takes democracy seriously cannot but be at odds with education reforms which espouse the language and values of market forces and treat education as a commodity to be purchased and consumed. In a democracy, education has to be constantly 'reformed' as part of a broader process of social change aimed at empowering more and more people consciously to participate in the life of their society."*⁴

1.1 Challenging market domination

Whilst the union acknowledges the mixed market as a contributing feature of the sector we submit that the regulation of the professional and operational status of the sector needs to improve. This is best achieved through nationally consistent regulations and standards that are rigorously adhered to and properly funded and enforced.

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ Carr, W. and Hartnett, A. (1996) *Education and the Struggle for Democracy* Buckingham: Open University Press

The current challenge of reform for Government is immense and includes the unusual and unprecedented scenario of a dominant three quarter share of service provision in the for-profit sector. The recent collapse of ABC Learning Centres has hurt the very people its services purported to support without any profit made from the venture being returned to the sector or broader society in any discernable measure. Ultimately the collapse has undermined the public's confidence in the system as a whole, and at a time when the economy and people's future capacities within it are under increasing pressure.

Increasingly research reveals that the corporate and for profit sectors return profit to share holders and operators rather than reinvesting in the industry. There is particularly little reinvestment in the workforce resulting in high staff turnover and low wages and conditions⁵. Despite the economies of scale and broader career path opportunities that larger organisations are well placed to achieve, an underpinning fiscal imperative to operate at capacity and maximise viability will have deleterious effects on the delivery of quality care. Quality improvements are unlikely in the absence of robust regulatory and quality assurance systems and where fee subsidies go to an indirect consumer of the service- that is parents. This is especially the case in the provision of children's services where the main consumer is the child who relies on third party adults to formally assess the quality of their daily experiences. Only recently has research begun to focus on children's perceptions of quality expressed through measurable indicators such as Cortisol – a biochemical measure of stress or wellbeing in varied contexts⁶.

There is now an urgent need to reassess the application of market principles to children's education and care and to cushion families' exposure to market vagaries and failures. The LHMU asks the Committee to consider the following valid criticisms of market mechanisms applying to this human service sector:

- The consumer of the service (product) is not easily distinguishable under the current model of demand side funding. Is it the child, parent or Government when the bulk of investment goes to Child Care Benefit (CCB) & Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR)?
- The tendency for parents to overestimate the professional quality of their service and when they are not realistically in a position to objectively measure this.⁷
- The capacity for parents to 'choose' and or change between 'competing' services, enabling the product competitive efficiency principle to operate, cannot apply in a sector that has a scarcity of product (childcare places) and the unrealistic expectation that parents or children can 'shop around'.

⁵ Brennen, D., Blaxland, M. & Tannous. K. (2008) *A strategic Assessment of the Children's Services Industry*. Social Policy Research Centre

⁶ Sims, Guilfoyle & Parry, 2008.

⁷ Big Steps in childcare Survey, LHMU, 2008.

- ‘Marketisation’ of childcare has not realised its promise of more places, lowered cost and higher quality. Supply of places still does not meet demand, costs have risen faster than inflation, and the percentage of services requiring ‘review’ in the quality assurance system has increased along with the pressure to lower standards for qualified staffing.

The LHMU submits that each child has the right to a participatory place in a securely guaranteed and professional ECEC setting. That right must be underpinned by staff who are paid professional rates and have secure working conditions that enable their professional practise to flourish. The LHMU champions the rights of Australian families to the best ECEC service enabling their workforce preparation, participation or respite from child rearing. But the union also contends that this parental imperative should not override the entitlement of children to work, play and rest in appropriate settings.

The LHMU works closely with the reality of ECEC service provision and contends that the work environment impacting on workforce members is inextricably linked to the environments deemed optimal for child and parent involvement. Improved conditions such as lower ratios of children to staff are good for children and parents as well as the workforce, sector and, in the long-term, communities and economies. There is therefore a dual imperative to improve these conditions so as to impact positively on the retention of a qualified workforce as well as the quality of ECEC service it provides to children and families.

1.2 Funding – from demand to supply

Australia currently expends a comparatively woeful 0.4 % of one percent of GDP on ECEC services (childcare and preschool combined). This is against an OECD average of 0.7% with a number of European countries exceeding 1.00%.⁸

Funding of childcare is addressed in Australia via government subsidies paid directly to parents through the child care benefit (CCB) and the child care tax rebate (CCTR). This current method of providing funding directly to parents means there is minimal opportunity for governments to effectively ensure the provision of quality services. Whilst acknowledging Australia’s unique linkage of this funding to a mandatory quality assurance system (QIAS) the LHMU contends that the system needs to be strengthened, streamlined and consolidated along with state regulatory systems.

The commitment to universal access for all 4 year olds to a 15 hour pre-school programme will increase our national expenditure on childcare and pre-school services. Whilst the LHMU applauds this initiative, it is being added to an ECEC system in crisis and in need of urgent reform. We need to

⁸ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. *The child care transition. A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countires*. Report card 8, 2008.

debate the provision of ECEC in Australia and develop sustainable public policy.

The LHMU submits that there are existing service models that in part and or combination could achieve the Government's reform goals. The significant financial investment estimated as 1.5 billion for 07/08 (which includes school age care services)⁹ currently paid to parents as CCB or CCTR could be reinvested directly into long-term infrastructure planning and human capital investment approaches to ECEC service provision.

Supply side funding requires a fundamental philosophical shift from the view of ECEC services as a 'consumption model'- determined by workforce participation to one of human capital investment -akin to that of our compulsory schooling system.

A supply side funding approach to childcare could contain regulation to ensure there is 'feedback' of profit or surplus funding into the system. Private operators could be required to put back a percentage to the continued funding of childcare.

The following fairness principles for ECEC should underpin supply side funding;

- **Planning for new parents, staff and children to the sector** needs to be co-ordinated from an ongoing and local assessment of communities of homes or workplaces. Planning for projected demographic birth rates or workforce participation forecasts must be balanced with the new assumption that each family will be entitled to, and be able to benefit from a participative place in a ECEC service.
- **Closing the policy gap between universal paid-parental leave and access to an ECEC system**¹⁰

The Government's commitment for universal access to education that starts when a child is four must be extended 'downwards' (for children who are 1, 2 and 3 years old), 'outwards' across a longer day to accommodate diverse workforce participation patterns, and 'in tandem' with universal provision of paid parental leave and parental access to child and family centre supports.

The LHMU has described in detail how universal access would need to be underpinned by funding to up-skill the existing workforce to meet the qualified staff required to deliver this entitlement in ECEC services whilst simultaneously meeting parental workforce participation requirements across the working day (see *Big Steps Universal Solution* doc, 2008) .

⁹ Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR). *Annual Report 2008*. Available at www.annualreport.deewr.gov.au/2008

¹⁰ Moss, P., Key note address at Sydney Day Nursery Conference, NSW, 2008.

- **Increasing participation and inclusion in better integrated ECEC services**

The LHMU applauds the Labour Government's plan to invest in an additional 260 centres on school sites and community land. These centres will provide important linkages between school and local communities, practical solutions for parent commuting and manifest exemplars of the integration of care with education. We submit however that these centres will need to be carefully designed and refurbished for adaptation to comply with the same standards that services catering exclusively for children in early childhood must. They must also be realised with the explicit intention of better preparing schools for early childhood sector participants as much as preparing children for school.

The LHMU also envisages ECEC as an important component of the proposed child and family 'hubs' which provide intensive intervention and family support from within multi-disciplinary teams of professionals, including child care staff, who can support parenting as well as work and other pursuits. These are resource intensive services with long-term returns on investment that form critical early steps in family transitions towards more mainstream ECEC, school attendance and workforce participation.

1.3 Equality and Fairness

Research shows that ECEC services disproportionately improve the social and educational outcomes for marginalised children and it is important to ensure that these children are not allowed to fall further behind their more advantaged mainstream peers prior to entering primary school because of lack of access to good quality ECEC.¹¹ Fiscal incentives such as traineeships/scholarships and support funding for families with additional needs would counteract the propensity for services to exclude participants from this more resource intensive model in order to maximise viability.

The Government's reforms explicitly seek to address Australia's most marginalised children first. The LHMU commends COAG's first agreement to a National Partnership in Indigenous Early childhood Development that will secure holistic maternal, ante-natal and early childhood health, education and well-being programs across Australia¹².

¹¹ Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), *Fair Start: 10-point plan for early childhood education and care*. ACOSS Info 383 February 2006

¹² Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, *National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, 2008
http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-10-02/docs/indigenous_early_childhood_NPA.pdf

The LHMU submits that Indigenous ways of educating and caring for children in their early years must be an integral influence on reforms proposed for regulation, quality assurance, staffing qualifications and workforce development strategies.

Many of the concerns raised above with the market driven or demand driven models are echoed in the recent COAG report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Quality Early Childhood Education and Care.¹³ The report summarises similar concerns of a market driven approach to childcare provision from the OECD Starting Strong II report as;

- the move away from the principle of providing universality in education
- that demand-side funding is, in general, underfunded
- subsidies paid directly to parents weaken the steering capacity of governments
- subsidies may not be used efficiently on behalf of children
- the risk of inequity increases as providers may be reluctant to invest in poor or sparsely populated neighbourhoods.¹⁴

Recommendation 1

Childcare provision in Australia is ready to be shifted away from a market driven approach towards more supply-side funding. This will require further careful investigation and planning.

The LHMU recommends that work, from a firm evidence base, be undertaken in developing financial modelling and a realistic implementation strategy to reform ECEC in Australia.

2. Short Term Reform

2.1 Workforce Development

No reform of the provision of childcare can succeed without workforce reform. A quality ECEC system can no longer be sustained by the exploitation of underpaid and under recognised childcare professionals. Workforce reform needs to include nationally standard minimum qualifications and a recognised career path from the Certificate III, through Diploma to Degree holders.

The current quality improvement and accreditation system (QIAS) administered through the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) has a strong focus on the delivery of quality ECEC and refers to the sector's staff as "child care professionals"¹⁵. ECEC services are measured across 7 areas (and 33 principles) of professional attainment underpinning quality:

¹³ *Towards a national quality framework for early childhood education and care*. Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Quality Early Childhood Education and Care. January 2009

¹⁴ Ibid pg 6

¹⁵ *Quality and Improvement Accreditation System*, National Childcare Accreditation Council http://www.ncac.gov.au/about_ncac/about_qias.asp

- Staff Relationships with Children and Peers
- Partnerships with Families
- Programming and Evaluation
- Children's Experiences and Learning
- Protective Care and Safety
- Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing
- Managing to Support Quality

Successful achievement of these relies, for the most part, on professional input from staff, and have been otherwise referred to as the qualitative 'determinants', rather than the quantitative 'contributing' elements (the iron triangle of ratios, group sizes and qualifications) of quality¹⁶. Research has consistently identified the employment of qualified staff as an indicator and determinant of quality care¹⁷. Yet, nowhere in the national QIAS system are services rated on staffing qualifications and their commensurate wages and conditions. These 'contributors' to quality fall to the state licensing authorities to regulate where currently there is pressure to lower standards in response to the high turnover and shortages of qualified staff.

Details of the LHMU's workforce strategy including a plan and costings related to up-skilling the existing workforce, are outlined in the attached document "Big Steps in childcare: A universal solution"

Recommendation 2

The LHMU submits that the Commonwealth and State governments should fund an early childhood career path built on a national classification structure and stepping up to a four year university trained ECEC professional. Training structures should support early childhood professionals to articulate between these classification levels through Commonwealth ECEC pathways scholarships which offer HECS subsidies and release time for study. Free VET training should continue to be bolstered by a National system of Recognition of Prior Learning for early childhood workers.

2.2 Planning

Currently no planning provisions exist in relation to the location of childcare services. A childcare operator having met state regulations and accreditation requirements can open a centre in any geographical location without regard to the presence or otherwise of existing services. Australia's recent reliance on

¹⁶ Wangmann, J., (1995) *Towards integration and quality assurance in children's services*, AIFS Early Childhood Studies, Paper no. 6.

¹⁷ Social Policy Research Centre (2004) *Early Childhood Teachers and Qualified Staff*, University of New South Wales Research Consortium: Sydney.

market driven mechanisms to deliver new childcare services has resulted in those services being placed in areas where they can make a profit rather than where they are needed. This has meant services are not necessarily spread equitably across geographic or population groups and that

A planning process must be developed and implemented to ensure places are available in areas of need and that other areas are not over supplied. A planning process should ensure that to the extent possible all Australian children regardless of geography have access to a place in an ECEC setting as they would primary and further education.

It is a stark reality that given the lack of planning process in the past without the expansion of the corporate sector we would face at this time a chronic shortage of childcare places. The reliance on this market driven approach however does not lead to an equitable distribution of childcare places, as they are developed around profit but not necessarily need and when it fails, such as the case of ABC Learning, the government is left with no option but to intervene. This situation would never be allowed to develop in our school system.

Recommendation 3

That a national planning system be developed to ensure childcare places are available where needed and are equitably available to all children.

2.3 Licensing, Accreditation and Regulation

Licensing and accreditation is currently operated by state governments. This leads to differing requirements in each state. Differences across states lead to a confusing, complex system and are a disincentive to working across states.

The LHMU recommends the creation of a nationally consistent and streamlined licensing, accreditation and regulation regime.

The current accreditation system must include staff qualifications, and the wages and conditions we know will arrest their attenuation to other less skilled but better rewarded and remunerated jobs. National standards should be developed on evidence based ratios and group sizes as well as for a minimum entry qualification for staff. In addition to ratios, group size and qualification the LHMU suggests further proposals for minimum content for national regulations. Further detail on each of these can be found in the attached document “Securing the best start for children”

- Inductions for new childcare workers
- Staff rest periods and places: including tea/ bathroom breaks and staff rooms
- Cleaning, cooking and maintenance standards that require specific staff for these auxiliary functions to care and education

- Roster display of qualified staff in attendance
- Program preparation and planning time
- Public notification of licence acquisition and accreditation status

New national licensing, accreditation and standards should not just apply to operators of childcare services. Currently, apart from private operators who own and operate childcare services, there are also models where the operator does not own the building or land. As a matter of priority, a regulatory framework needs to be established to apply, not just to childcare operators, but to property investors as well. A regulatory framework of this nature already exists in aged care provision where all parties involved in an aged care facility be they owners or service providers, have some accountability for delivering a quality service.

It is the opinion of the LHMU that the development of consistent national standards should take place before the establishment of any new national authority. Establishing a new layer of bureaucracy before the creation of nationally consistent standards is putting the cart before the horse.

It may be that the best way to licence, regulate and monitor new national standards is to establish such a body. However, we would recommend that the states and the Commonwealth work together to determine the best way to oversee a nationally consistent industry, whether this be state based or via a national authority.

Recommendation 4

The LHMU recommends that new, nationally consistent, licensing, accreditation, regulation and standards be developed. That these should;

- **enforce evidence based minimum ratios and maximum group sizes developed by Early Childhood Australia**

Maximum staff ratio		Maximum group size
Under twos	1:3	No more than 9
Two to three	1:5	No more than 15
Three to five	1:8	No more than 24

- **allocate four hours of non contact programming time per week to childcare professionals responsible for leading development programs with children**
- **include the following minimum standards**
 - **Inductions for new childcare workers**
 - **Staff rest periods and places: including tea/ bathroom breaks and rooms**

- **Cleaning, cooking and maintenance standards that require specific staff for these auxillary functions to care and education**
- **Roster display of qualified staff in attendance**
- **Program preparation and planning time**
- **Public notification of licence acquisition and accreditation status**

2.4 Public access to information

Information regarding licensing, ownership and accreditation should be readily accessible public information. The collapse of ABC Developmental Learning Pty Ltd has highlighted an urgent need for national regulation and licensing. Information regarding the ownership of ECEC services, including the premises from which they operate. This information needs to be publicly available through a range of sources, including the web. Corporations, property trusts and private equity companies involved in the delivery of ECEC must be clearly identified and regulated. This information should be web based and available through either the one site, or linked. Currently information is adhoc, locked away by privacy laws in some States and only available through exhaustive web searches.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that information regarding licensing, accreditation and ownership be made publically available and easily accessible.



BIG STEPS

in childcare
A universal solution

A National Early Childhood Workforce Strategy to provide 15 hours preschool by 2013; increase second-earners workforce participation; address pay parity in a female-dominated workforce; and prevent staff turnover by creating opportunities for professional progression.



The childcare union

Foreword

The Federal Government's early childhood agenda is both exciting and ambitious. It acknowledges the critical importance of the early years to a person's lifelong capacity to learn and think, relate and form social bonds, feel secure and experience the creativity and joy of play.

It is this acknowledgement of the importance of integrating play and education in early childhood that is so groundbreaking. As increasing numbers of families require formal childcare services to support their workforce and study requirements it is a real step forward that these services be seen as more than simply childminding services. A child's capacity to learn in these early years is immense. But so is their need for play and care and often within extended hours environments. That is why an integrated service is so appropriate.

The enabler to delivering this vision of a quality integrated education and care early childhood sector is clearly the workforce. This submission looks at the range of workforce development issues demanding attention if this vision is to truly become a reality.

The modelling shows that this is doable. It won't happen overnight and it won't happen without planning and support. But happen it can.

This is our opportunity as a community to get this right. To give due regard to the critical developmental needs of 0-5 years olds in our community. To respect and enhance the skills of the people entrusted with the care and development of these young children. To ensure that the best quality care and education programs are delivered by a qualified, caring and stable workforce.

It will take time, money, openness to innovation and cooperation from all associated with the sector. But the promise of what is possible needs to drive us all to break through the barriers and recognise the very real opportunity before us to finally get this right.



LOUISE TARRANT

National Secretary

LHMU – The Childcare Union

www.lhmu.org.au

www.bigsteps.org.au



An Endorsement from Early Childhood Australia

Australia's leading advocate for social justice, equity and quality in the education and care of children from birth to eight.

Early Childhood Australia warmly congratulates the LHMU for focusing its efforts on workforce development in the early childhood services sector through the Big Steps in Childcare campaign. As is well known, early childhood services around Australia struggle with a range of workforce issues – to the detriment of our young children. The LHMU's National Early Childhood Workforce Strategy proposes an important and positive step towards addressing this situation.

ECA commends the union for its recognition that all childcare centres should be centres of early learning, delivering intentional high quality early education and good outcomes for young children – and for showing that practical and affordable steps can be taken to build the early childhood workforce to achieve this. The strategy of building on the existing experience of staff and raising the overall level of skills in the sector is an important step towards creating an early childhood workforce where everyone has a useful qualification and there are sufficient highly qualified specialist early childhood teachers for the important tasks of ongoing pedagogical and program leadership in all services.

This in itself will help Australia overcome the damaging 'care/education' division that has so influenced our early childhood funding programs, the development and delivery of our services and the education of early childhood practitioners.

International evidence shows that for young children in early childhood services stability of staff, high levels of staff qualification, good remuneration and sound career structures together are among the strong predictors of good outcomes for children. The steps towards improvements in qualification levels, remuneration and career structure in the union's proposal have the potential to be a great boost to staff stability in the sector – with related benefits for our young children. Our very young children and their futures are too important for us not to take steps like these.

MARGARET YOUNG

President

Early childhood Australia

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au



Introduction

LHMU enthusiastically endorses the Commonwealth Government's drive to reform, re-value and restructure early childhood care and education service delivery in the interests of creating better outcomes for young children and their families.

There are many elements that will be crucial to getting this right – quality accreditation, ratios, the Early Years Learning Framework and centre-based programming, etc. However, key to delivering on all these elements is getting the workforce capabilities right – hence the focus in this discussion paper on the underpinning workforce development strategy required to support quality education and care within Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector.

We think the skills of the early childhood workforce are the glue around which all other key reforms to ECEC in Australia will stick.

Key to our thinking on workforce issues has been our partnership and collaboration with Early Childhood Australia. Together we are grappling with how to develop the best possible system – characterised by high quality standards and outcomes for children as well as attractive career paths for workers – but also how to transition to this in the set timeframe in a way that creates least turmoil, cost and disruption to services and families.

In summary our workforce development strategy is structured as follows:

Underlying assumptions:

- Key to delivery of quality outcomes for children is a capable and stable workforce – with capability reflective of commitment, qualifications and stability.
- That a universal preschool program needs to apply across all early childhood settings – including preschool and long day care.
- That a preschool program should be delivered by a 4 year university trained ECEC teacher.
- That the introduction of a preschool program into long day-care settings will not displace existing workers.
- That the development of new skills and qualifications to deliver the Government's agenda be focused on existing staff in the first instance.
- That the qualifications and focus of upskilling have a specific early childhood focus – as distinct from a more traditional school focus.
- That government assistance be provided to facilitate upskilling.

Core interpretative issues – making integration of education and care a reality

In a long day care setting the objective of quality outcomes for all children and the specific delivery of a pre-school program requires a slightly different model to that employed in a sessional based pre-school approach. In the later instance children attend for the specified hours – 15 hours as proposed as a national standard – and a teacher delivers a structured program to that time setting.

Long day-care is a very different environment both in terms of children's attendance and in terms of how learning, play and extended hours care need to mesh. Hence the need to ensure that integration of preschool programs in long day-care involves a genuine integration of education and care programs for children attending 'across the long day'.

The ideal learning environment for children who attend long day-care on average for seven to eight hours per day, is one that enables children to engage in learning and development at different times of the day – hence the need for integration of the pre-school program in the overall delivery of care and development activities within a long day-care centre.

This need is reinforced by the fact that children in the year before school attend across a range of days and hours in long day-care, so the notion of stipulating a set 'pre-school' program has real logistical difficulties.

Our workforce modelling proposal involves a four-year university educated ECEC teacher employed full-time in a long day-care setting to offer all four-year-olds attending long day-care a preschool program 'across the long day'. Preschool programs developed and delivered by a four-year trained ECEC teacher employed in a long day-care centre five days per week will offer children the same outcomes as a fifteen hours sessional preschool program.

Even if parents choose to access a teacher-led, 'across the long day' preschool program in a long day-care setting for just fifteen hours per week, their children will still achieve equivalent care and education outcomes as children attending traditional sessional preschool programs for fifteen hours. The 'across the long day' model of preschool provision will offer four-year-olds who attend long day-care for more than fifteen hours more access to a teacher-led preschool program than a minimal commitment to fifteen hours of sessional preschool can offer.

On the face of it, this approach to integrating preschool programs within long day-care settings increases the initial

costs of implementing the universal preschool promise, as it requires the funding of full time teachers as opposed to the ‘parachute option’ which would see teachers contracted-in for just the 15 hours of sessional work.

However, we think there is room to upskill existing Diploma holder in long day-care settings to teacher qualified positions, and maintain existing staffing levels within long day-care staff-to-child ratios. This submission models the cost offsets such an approach could take and shows considerable savings. These savings don’t take into account the additional savings an integrated long day-care model will offer through it’s enabling of increased women’s workforce participation.

ECEC Workforce Career Path for Long Day Care Settings

LHMU thinks the need for recognising and mandating qualified staff impacts all aspects of care and education delivery in long day-care. In addition to the mandating of 4 year qualified ECEC staff to implement ‘across the long day’ preschool programs, LHMU would argue for an introduction of mandatory minimum qualifications for all staff working in early childhood. This initiative will be necessary to provide a foundation for skills development in the ECEC sector and is an initiative already being implemented in Queensland. We would propose that the entry level qualification be pegged to an AQF Certificate III in Children’s Services.

Transitioning the current workforce to a new capability

Evidence suggests between 30-45% of current LDC workers have no formally recognised qualifications. A range of routes exist for shifting this large group to a minimum AQF Certificate III qualified status. A spectrum of options exist - grandfathering some or all workers, deeming, RPL and formal study. This paper looks at a range of RPL options in particular that are sympathetic to the needs of a recognisable ‘non-traditional learner’ workforce.

Proposals and costings are also submitted on the desirability, indeed necessity of providing upskilling opportunities for current Diploma holders to four year ECEC teacher qualified status. Consequential proposals are then made relating to backfilling the vacated Diploma held positions by providing facilitative arrangements for Certificate III workers to transition to Diploma-level qualifications.

In all instances we were forced to confront and respond to two compelling issues that will undermine these reforms if not appropriately addressed - time and money.

Workers in a long day-care setting currently struggle with undertaking external study when it comes at the end of an already long and taxing working day. Secondly, this is close to minimum wage workforce. The costs of study are beyond the reach of many workers – particularly when the financial return on higher qualifications is so marginal.

This paper proposes options that respond to these twin barriers. We look at the notion of funded release time - a model that would see a day per week’s funding support for long day-care centres to release upskilling staff to study externally. We also consider extension of some existing Commonwealth Government initiatives that relate to HECs subsidies. In so doing we look at other public models of support that link individual staff support, service support and bonding as possible elements to future solutions.

Post Transition

This discussion paper does not address in detail the post-transition stage of the LHMU’s proposed upskilling effort, but failure to do so will undo any gains made. Obviously the urgent focus for the next few years will be on up skilling initiatives that make it possible for the long day-care workforce to genuinely engage in a qualifications ‘uplift’. But this only addresses workforce issues in part. If we don’t address the two other key issues – workload via the quality debate around ratios and remuneration - we won’t retain workers. This transition stage may well become simply a migratory stage to other sectors rather than an upskilling of the long day-care workforce.

Wages are a critical issue in any workforce development strategy and we need to look at this issue in the context of the looming debate about sector funding, the current pay equity enquiry and application of the new bargaining regime for low-paid workers contained in the proposed new federal industrial legislation.

We need to address what’s at the end of the study path if we are to encourage people to embark on the journey.

In summary

Clearly we are very supportive of the Commonwealth Government’s initiatives in relation to introduction of a universal preschool program and a general push to improve quality standards and outcomes in all early childhood settings. We think this is a long overdue policy response and one that has the potential to revolutionise how we think about a child’s early years and how we acknowledge and respect the largely female workforce that delivers early education and care services. We submit this discussion paper as part of the debate around implementing this strategy. We welcome the opportunity to expand on any of the proposals contained herein or engage in further discussion around other options that address the critical question – how do we facilitate the current workforce, already committed to this sector, to have existing skills recognised and new skills developed in ways that are inclusive, effective and meaningful to deliver this brave new vision for integrated education and learning outcomes for young children?



Executive Summary

An analysis of the attendance patterns of four-year-olds to children's services makes one thing clear: parents with children in the year before school use a 'patchwork' of care and education services to support their work commitments. Forty-two per cent of couple families combine traditional preschool programs with another form of formal care,¹ most often in a long day-care setting. The main reason they do this is to support their work commitments: 74 per cent of mothers with four-year-olds worked between 16 and 35-plus hours a week in 2005.²

A survey of 'patchwork care' arrangements in Australia highlights the pressure that segmentation between traditional preschool programs and long day-care services places on working families. Patchwork care arrangements also raise significant challenges for the implementation of the Government's commitment to provide fifteen hours a week of teacher-led preschool, to all children in the year before school.

At first glance, the cheapest way to ensure all four-year-olds have access to fifteen hours of teacher-led preschool would be to notch-up hours in traditional preschool programs and 'parachute in' teachers for fifteen hours in long day-care settings. However, a three hour extension of sessional preschool programs will not help families juggling patchwork care arrangements, or support an increase in women's workforce participation. Nor will 'parachuting' teachers into long day-care for fifteen hours ensure that all four-year-olds in long day receive fifteen hours of face-to-face time with an ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) teacher, because all four-year-olds do not attend long day-care services for the same fifteen-hour block.

If government is committed to providing all four-year-olds with access to a teacher-led program, with a teacher present on-site, differences in four-year old attendance patterns leave little alternative but to support a full-time teacher requirement in long day-care settings catering for children in the year before school.

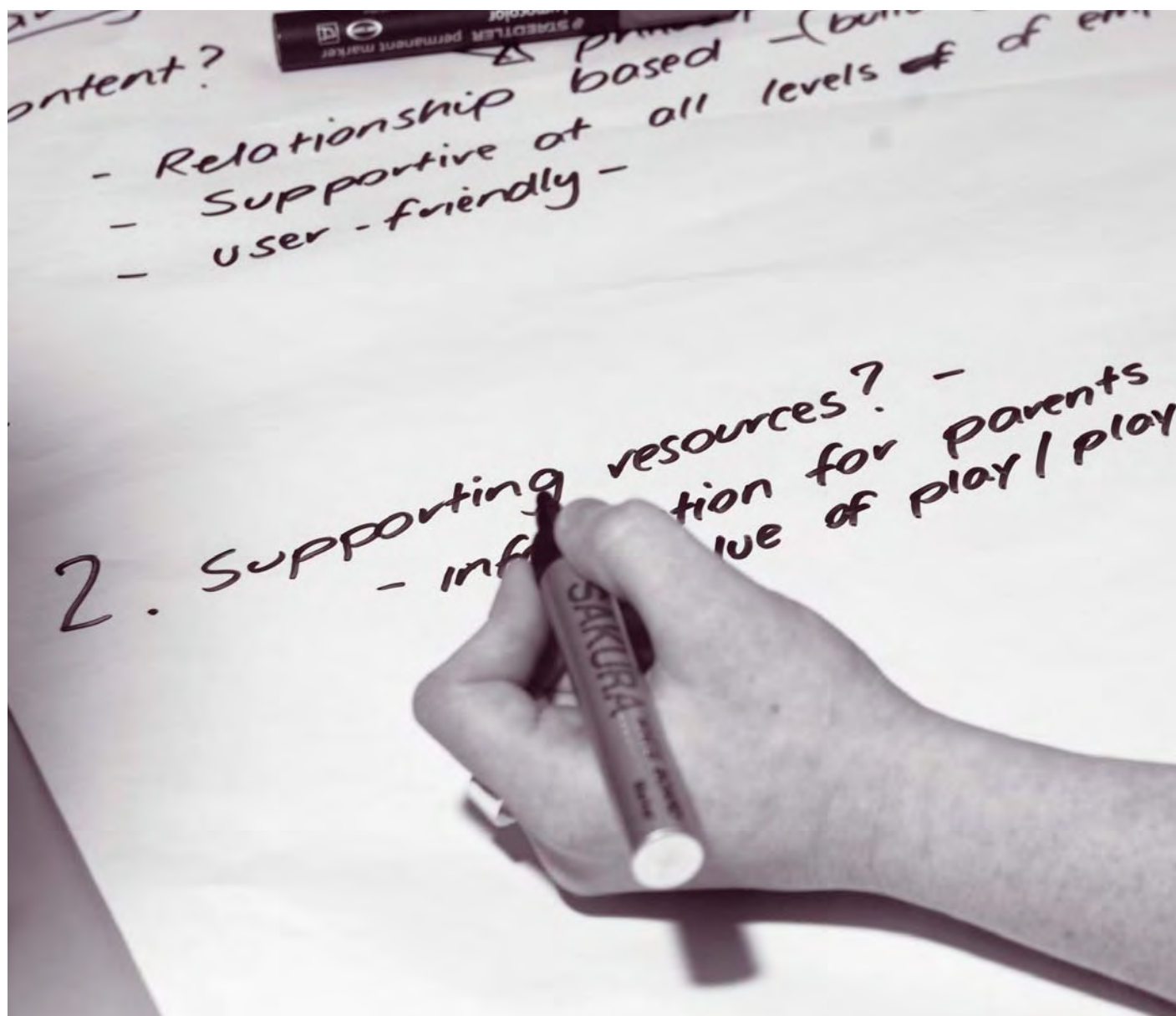
Supporting a full-time, four-year trained ECEC teacher in the three-to-five year-old room in long day-care centres will offer all four-year-olds attending long day care **the equivalent of a fifteen hours sessional preschool program**. Even if parents choose to access a teacher-led, 'across the long day' preschool program in a long day-care setting for just fifteen hours per week, their children will still achieve the same care and education outcomes as children attending traditional sessional preschool programs for fifteen hours.

Parents often choose sessional preschool because it is cheaper and because they see it as the only service that provides educational opportunities for their children in the year before school. By supporting preschool programs 'across

the long day' in long day-care settings, government can offer parents real choice about how to arrange their child's care and education attendance in the year before school, in a way that supports parents' workforce participation.

LHMU proposes that the most reliable, sustainable and cost-effective way of providing a full-time, four-year trained teacher in the three-to-five year old room in long day-care centres is to upskill existing Diploma-holding childcare workers to deliver preschool programs across the long day, five days per week. LHMU's upskilling proposal will:

- Guarantee that all four-year-olds attending long day-care have access to the equivalent of fifteen hours of an ECEC teacher-led preschool program, regardless of the day of the week they attend long day-care or community kindergarten. Under LHMU's 'upskilling' plan, four-year-olds who attend long day-care for more than fifteen hours per week will receive access to even more than the fifteen hours of four-year trained, ECEC teacher-led preschool the Commonwealth has offered families.
- Providing preschool programs 'across the long day' in long day-care centres will offer working parents the choice of accessing a high-quality preschool program in a long day-care centre, on whatever day and time-slot they need to support their work commitments. This will make it easier for families to juggle their work and family commitments, thus supporting increased workforce participation and COAG's 'Human Capital' agenda;
- Ensure that the goal of fifteen hours universal preschool is not derailed by shortages four-year trained ECEC teachers, or an unwillingness of university educated teachers to work in long day-care centres;
- Ensure that teachers in long day-care centres are four-year university educated ECEC specialist. This will promote quality care and education for young children and prevent the need to provide bridging courses for primary-trained teachers who may be willing to work in early years settings;
- Support the genuine integration of education and care programs for the early years;
- Offer the Commonwealth a relative cost-saving in their fifteen-hours universal preschool investment, by reducing annual wage payments for teachers at state and territory level. In the LHMU upskilling model, long day-care centres will only have to fund the difference between existing diploma-level wages and four-year trained teacher wages, rather than subsidising an full teacher wage for fifteen hours or more;



- Create a career path for the early childhood workforce, which currently experiences chronic levels of turnover due to low wages and limited opportunities for professional progression;
- Contribute to addressing gender-based pay equity concerns for the female dominated, low-paid early childhood workforce;
- Offer low-paid workers an opportunity to improve their income through training and career progression.

Budget points

- The upskilling of diploma holders already working full-time in early childhood centres will save the Commonwealth significant amounts in its fifteen hours universal preschool investment, offering up to **\$94,013,390 in annual savings** on wages in long day-care centres.
- Extending the 50 per cent HECS subsidy (for students

committed to working in rural areas) to 2341 low-paid childcare workers to upgrade their qualifications to a four-year ECEC degree to meet universal preschool teacher requirements would cost government approximately **\$3,839,240 per year** over five years.

- Backfill payments to long day-care centres and community kindergartens/preschools, to cover release-time for upskilling diploma holders, would cost the Commonwealth approximately **\$69,696,252** over four years.
- Introducing a mandatory minimum qualification for early childhood education and care workers will cost the sector approximately **\$88,629,908** in additional wages per annum.
- Upskilling 2341 Certificate III holders to diploma level, to replace diploma holders upgrading to teacher-level, will cost the sector approximately **\$7,952,377** in additional wages per annum.

A summary of LHMU proposals

Early Childhood Professional Pathways Scholarship

The upskilling of diploma holders already working full-time in early childhood centres will save the Commonwealth significant amounts in its fifteen hours universal preschool investment, offering up to \$94,013,390 in annual savings in long day-care centres. This is because upskilling current diploma holders to teacher level means government need only subsidise the wage difference between current diploma-level and teacher wages, rather than a full teacher wage for between 15 and 40 hours per week.

National LHMU modelling indicates that the early childhood sector will require at least 2341 additional ECEC teachers by the year 2013, to provide universal preschool for all children in the year before school. ECA and LHMU propose that the Commonwealth works with states and territories to develop a national Early Childhood Professional Pathways Scholarship for Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Diploma holders in long day-care and community kindergarten settings to upgrade their qualification to degree level.

Because early childhood workers fit the profile of 'non-traditional learners', LHMU propose that these scholarships be used to address the financial and time barriers that so often prevent low-paid, female childcare workers with family responsibilities from accessing training opportunities.

Modeled on Victoria's "Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships for Pathway Students Scheme", national Early Childhood Professional Pathways Scholarships should include:

An extension of the 50 per cent HECS subsidy (currently offered to students committed to working in rural areas) to low-paid childcare workers. Offering this subsidy to diploma holders targeted to upgrade their qualifications to a four-year ECEC degree (to meet universal preschool teacher requirements) would cost government approximately \$3,839,240 per year over five years.

Backfill payments to centres to allow pathways students one day off per week, to complete their studies and the practicum component of their degree. Backfill payments for pathways students would cost the Commonwealth approximately \$69,696,252 over four years.

Some long day-care centres will find it challenging to find AQF Diploma qualified childcare workers to backfill workers upskilling to four-year ECEC qualifications for one day per

week. Further consideration among sector leaders is required to develop a strategy to provide sufficient qualified childcare workers for backfill. The LHMU's upskilling plan should in itself contribute to providing sufficient Diploma qualified staff for backfill, through the upskilling of 2341 current AQF Certificate III qualified workers. The upskilling plan will also improve career paths and wages for large numbers of early childhood workers, which will contribute significantly to increasing workforce stability and reducing the huge turnover of early childhood workers each year.

Teacher Registration

In terms of registration for ECEC teachers, which currently is not provided by state and territory teacher registration boards, LHMU proposed that consideration be given to a long-term plan for providing registration for all early childhood workers through an early childhood specific professional association. There is significant scope for an early childhood professional association to accredit ECEC course content and supporting early childhood career paths by coordinating articulation between VET and HE.

A whole of workforce strategy

While Commonwealth ECEC Pathways Scholarships will ensure sufficient ECEC teacher supply to implement government's universal preschool commitment by 2013, for this commitment to be sustainable, a whole of workforce strategy is needed. The introduction of national mandatory minimum qualifications in Australian ECEC will be a crucial step in creating a genuine career path in children's services, and the 'Iron Triangle'³ of inputs required to guarantee quality education and care for families.

Skilling Australia

At first, providing formal qualifications for the approximately 17,137 workers in long day-care and 7,479 workers in state and community preschools without early childhood qualifications appears a daunting prospect. Yet through government's existing Skilling Australia initiative, low, to no-cost training places can be extended to unqualified childcare



workers without the need to create additional budget items for training places. The only additional budget item necessary will be funding for the introduction of a nationally coordinated system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the early childhood workforce. This will ensure that the extension of Skilling Australia places to existing workers goes smoothly.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Following extensive consultations with training experts to seek innovative solutions for extending Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to low-paid workers, ECA and the LHMU propose the creation of a national ECEC training body responsible for coordinating RPL within the early childhood workforce. Potentially linked to a national professional registration body for Australia's early childhood workforce, this training body would engage key training stakeholders in a nationally coordinated system of RPL which promotes recognition of competencies through a 'professional conversations' approach and on-the-job observation.

Finally, a comprehensive whole of workforce strategy for the early childhood sector needs to consider upskilling AQF Certificate III workers in long day-care and preschool/kindergarten settings, to replace the diploma holders upskilled to deliver Australia's universal preschool program.

Wage costs of upskilling

While introducing a Pathways Scholarship and a nationally coordinated system of RPL will be the main proposed new costs to government resulting from the LHMU upskilling proposal, LHMU has modeled the additional wage costs to the sector that will result from upskilling, to offer government an approximate indication of the potential financial implications for employer and parents contributions to ECEC costs. Figures in Appendix 1 show the approximate costs of wage increases, per state and territory, for 2341 workers nationally to upskill from an AQF Certificate III to an AQF Diploma in Children's Services.

Attendance patterns of four-year-olds in ECEC

Due to data limitations a complete picture of the attendance patterns of four-year-olds in early childhood care and education is not possible. However, Harrison and Ungerer's 2005 analysis of LSAC (Longitudinal Study of Australian Children) data for four to five-year olds, gives the most complete picture of attendance patterns for four-year-olds. No other children's services data source looks across state and commonwealth jurisdictions at the patchwork of services that four-year-olds attend. Harrison is currently working on an updated analysis of the latest LSAC data, but did not have clearance from FACSIA to release this analysis for LHMU modelling.

Commencement of the AIHW National Minimum Data Set for Children's Services and release of the latest Longitudinal Study of Australian Children will provide more robust support for policy based on existing data on four-year-old attendance patterns.

According to Harrison and Ungerer, approximately 280,491 four-year-olds attended preschool or long day-care (LDC) in 2006. 82,704 four-year-olds attended LDC. 197,787 four-year-olds attended school-based preschool or community kindergarten.⁴

2005 LSAC data shows that preschool/kindergarten is the primary early childhood service attended by four-year-olds in Australia. This can be explained by the fact that five of eight state and territory governments have invested in preschool provision through a traditional education model. In the traditional education model, preschool services are delivered as a sessional program, with average attendance of 11 to 14 hours per week.⁵ Most children attend a number of half-day sessions but some states offer a mix of half-day and full-day sessions.⁶ Half-day and full-day sessions are within school hours, although community kindergartens/preschools often offer 'extended hours'.⁷ This is the case in 70 per cent of NSW community preschools and in QLD's C&K community kindergartens.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, long day-care was the second most common service attended by four-year-olds in 2005-06. The average number of hours spent in long day-care according to the 2005 LSAC was 21.6.⁸ This figure is similar to 2006 Child Care Census findings on the average hours spent in LDC for all age groups (approximately 20 hours).⁹



In summary, state and territory subsidized preschool/kindergarten for 11 to 12 hours is the primary children's service attended by four-year-olds in WA, SA, ACT, TAS and NT. Long day-care is the primary service attended by four-year-olds in NSW, followed by community kindergartens. Community kindergartens are the primary service attended by four-year-olds in Victoria and Queensland, followed by long day-care.

p14 - Figure 1. Four-year-old attendance by state and territory and sector.

	Preschool / Kindergarten	Community Kindergarten	Long Day Care
NSW	100 preschools, 9.7% of 4-yr-olds. Generally open school hours. The department claims average provision of 17 hours per week. Half-day sessions. Some provide full-day sessions.	800 community-based preschools, 36.9%. Large proportions (approx. 70%) of community preschools offer extended hours.	49.9% of 4-yr-olds attend LDC.
VIC	13.6% of 4-yr-olds Government subsidy for 10 hours per week. Half-day sessions. Some full-day sessions.	64% of 4-yr-olds Government subsidy for 10 hours per week. Most students attend four half-day sessions per week.	21% of 4-yr-olds
QLD	No pre-prep in schools. Prep year often represented in figures as the equivalent of preschool.	Around 37.5% of 4-year-olds receive a preschool program, mostly government subsidised provision through C&K community kindergartens. C&K kindergartens and LDC centres offer preschool programs delivered by one teacher per 22 children.	18346 or 19% of 4-yr-olds.
WA	84.6% of 4-yr-olds. Kindergarten is 11 hours a week offered in four half days, two full days, or one full day and two half days per week.		4514 or 14% of 4-yr-olds.
SA	70.7% of 4-yr-olds. 11 hours per week. Most students attend up to four half-day sessions per week.		4636 or 20% of 4-yr-olds.
TAS	81.5% of 4-yr-olds. 11 hours per week, a mixture of full-day and half-day provision.		1641 or 20% of 4-yr-olds.
ACT	63.4% of 4-yr-olds. (LSAC) ROGS data claims 83.3%. 12 hours per week. Sessions are either in a long day configuration (two x 6-hour days) or a short day configuration (three x 4-hour days).		144 or 2% of 4-yr-olds.

* NSW – LSAC indicates approximately 5% nationally are at home. 17.7% are in kindergarten.

Parent employment and patchwork care

What becomes clear when examining the attendance patterns of four-year-olds is the challenge that segmentation between traditional preschool programs and long day-care services poses for families. Baxter and Alexander's 2007 analysis of 2005 LSAC data shows that 49 per cent of mothers and 92 per cent of fathers in couple families are employed once their child has turned four, even when the child has younger siblings. When a four-year-old is the youngest child, 62 per cent of mothers and 92 per cent of fathers in couple families are employed. In 2005, 74 per cent of mothers with four-year-olds worked between 16 and 35-plus hours a week.¹⁰

Sessional preschool programs fail to fully support this level of workforce participation, a fact demonstrated by data on four-year-olds use of patchwork or multiple care options. 2005 LSAC data shows that 31 per cent of single parents and 42 per cent of couple parents combine preschool with another form of formal care such as long day-care.¹¹

Families that use only preschool services are likely to work shorter hours or be self-employed. Families in which both partners work are more likely to combine childcare with preschool services. Long day-care is the service most commonly used in combination with preschool attendance.¹²

Harrison's analysis of LSAC shows that about 40 per cent of parents with four to five-year olds use long day-care additional to preschool arrangements each week. Most of these families (78 per cent) used one form of care additional to preschool, while some (19 per cent) used two additional forms of care per week and a small number (3 per cent) used three additional forms of care per week. Overwhelmingly (68 per cent), additional childcare was used in order to meet the parents' need for work and/or study.¹³

Implications for the universal 15 hours

While patchwork care arrangements put pressure on families with four to five-year olds, and raise issues as to the continuity and quality of care and education programs for children, they also raise significant challenges for the implementation of 15-hours of universal preschool for all four-year-olds, or children in the year before school.

At first glance, the cheapest way to ensure all four-year-olds have access to 15 hours of teacher-led preschool would be to notch-up hours in traditional preschool programs and 'parachute in' teachers for fifteen hours per week in long day-care. However, a three hour extension of sessional preschool programs will not help families juggling patchwork care arrangements, or support an increase in women's workforce participation. Nor will 'parachuting' teachers into long day-

care for fifteen hours ensure that all four-year-olds in long day receive fifteen hours of face-to-face time with an ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) teacher, because all four-year-olds do not attend long day-care services for the same fifteen-hour block.

The 2004 Child Care Census¹⁴ charts families' use of long day-care across the week. A fairly even number of families use long day-care for one, two or three days per week and a smaller percentage of families use it for five weekdays.

The LHMU's April 2008 parent survey¹⁵ found that three in five families using long day-care have a child that attends for two or three days per week, while one in five families have a child that attends five days per week. The survey found that the length of time children spent in long day-care varied widely, from three to 11 hours per day, but eight was the average.

Figure 2. 2004 Child Care Census – families use of long day-care across the week.

1 weekday	26%
2 weekdays	31.1%
3 weekdays	22.2%
4 weekdays	8.9%
5 weekdays	11.8%

There is no publicly available data showing which weekdays four-year-olds attend long day-care. Operators, members and professional groups report that four-year-olds' attendance is dispersed throughout the week, in line with parental work commitments.

This leaves government with two main options for meeting its 15-hour commitment in long day-care.

A Full-time four-year ECEC teacher requirement in long day-care

If government remains committed to providing all four-year-olds attending long day-care with access to a four-year ECEC teacher-led program, differences in the long day-care attendance patterns of four-year-olds throughout the week leave government little alternative but to invest in the provision of a full-time teacher requirement in long day-care settings catering for children in the year before school.

Supporting a full-time, four-year trained ECEC teacher in the three-to-five year-old room in long day-care centres will offer all four-year-olds attending long day care **the equivalent of a**



fifteen hours sessional preschool program. Even if parents choose to access a teacher-led, ‘across the long day’ preschool program in a long day-care setting for just fifteen hours per week, their children will still achieve the same care and education outcomes as children attending traditional sessional preschool programs for fifteen hours.

Requiring a full-time teaching resource in long day-care settings will also contribute to genuinely integrating care and education programs in Australia, a move that is best for young children’s learning and development, but also provides the most support for working families and the government’s productivity agenda.

Identifying the need for a full-time four-year educated, ECEC teacher in long day-care settings, LHMU has modelled the most cost-effective and sustainable way to develop the early childhood workforce. By working with the states and territories and using universal preschool funding to upskill full-time AQF Diploma holders in long day-care, government can support requirements for a full-time teacher in long day-care settings without bearing the costs and challenges of introducing a whole

new pool of workers into the ECEC sector.

By upgrading the skills of a childcare professional already attached full-time to a long day-care centre, government can:

- ensure all four-year-olds attending long day-care gain access to a teacher-led preschool program, regardless of the day of the week four-year-olds attend long day-care;
- give working parents the option of accessing an affordable preschool program in long day-care on whatever day and time-slot they need to support work commitments;
- ensure the goal of universal preschool is not derailed by a shortage of four-year university educated ECEC teachers, or an unwillingness to work in the long day-care sector;
- make a relative cost-saving in its universal preschool investment, by enabling long day-care centers to fund the difference between diploma-level and teacher wages, rather than subsidising an entire teacher wage for 15 hours or more;
- contribute to creating a career path for the early childhood workforce, which currently experiences huge levels of turnover due to low wages and limited opportunities for professional progression.

Teacher supply and demand: from diploma to degree

The modelling below determines how many childcare professionals or teacher aides in each state and territory need to be upskilled by 2013 to provide teacher-led preschool programs to all four-year-olds. While the age of children attending preschool programs ranges from 3.5 to 5.5, reflecting differences in school starting ages in each state and territory (Appendix 2), this modelling uses four-year-old numbers as a gauge of demand.

Four-year-old numbers can be used to gauge demand as, while around 17 per cent of three-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs nationally,¹⁶ LSAC indicates that approximately 13.5 per cent of four-year-olds are already enrolled in school in year-before Year-1 programs and approximately 4.3 per cent of four-year-olds don't attend any formal children's services.¹⁷ Because the number of three-year-olds attending preschool is similar to the number of four-year-olds attending school, four-year-old numbers can be used as a rough gauge of demand for preschool programs. For accuracy, modelling can be broken down by state and territory, with data based on population projections incorporating children's birthdates. However, such detailed data was not available to the LHMU at the time of modelling.

Four-year-olds numbers are taken from ABS projections, contained in Appendix 3. Workforce demographic data is taken predominately from the National Children's Services Workforce Study (NCSWS), which was selected as a key national data source because it incorporates state and territory preschool workforces in most states and territories. Where NCSWS fails to include preschool workforces (South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania), it has been supplemented by workforce data from the National Preschool Census and data provided by the Western Australian Department of Education and Training. The number of four-year-olds in long day-care, by state, has been taken from the 2006 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services.

Teacher demand has been determined at a ratio of one ECEC teacher to 20 (1:20) four-year-olds.

ECEC graduate numbers to 2013 have not been factored into workforce growth projections, as an analysis of ECEC enrolment and completions figures from 2001 to 2006 shows no significant changes likely to impact established teacher supply patterns within the early childhood workforce. To determine this, modelling compared ECEC graduate history

to ECEC teacher ratios from 2001 to 2006. Enrolment and completions data is available in Appendix 4.

Modelling for 2007 shows teacher demand by state and territory but also by sector. This is necessary, as state teacher supply does not always match four-year-old attendance patterns. While there could be sufficient teachers to provide preschool for four-year-olds at a 1:20 ratio at state level for example, the available teachers may be concentrated in either the preschool or the long day-care sector. In this case, State and Territory Government's have the option of providing incentives for teachers to transfer between preschool and long day-care, or supporting the upskilling additional workers in the sector with the low teacher ratio.

Modeling for 2010 and 2012 is statewide without a breakdown by sector. Modeling could make predictions on teacher supply and demand by sector by using the 2007 ratio of preschool/long day-care attendance. This approach would need to include more detailed consideration of potential influences on long day-care and preschool attendance patterns to 2013.

Modeling results, showing the number of AQF Diploma holders to be upskilled per state and territory, are summarised in Figure 3 and 3(b).

Figure 3. Statewide upskilling requirements to 2013 at a 1:20 ratio

NSW	- (+44)
VIC	849
QLD	1201
WA	- (+586)
SA	- (+416)
NT	187
ACT	104
TAS	- (+191)
National	2341

A summary of sector-specific upskilling requirements for 2007

	Long Day Care	Preschool (school-based and community kindergarten)	4-yr-olds not accessing either
NSW	- (+1085)	1636	-
VIC	96	906	-
QLD	30	291	786
WA	- (+18)	- (+764)	-
SA	14	- (+389)	-
NT	8	13	132
ACT	- (+68)	7	109
TAS	- (+9)	- (+53)	-
National	148	2853	1027

Teacher supply and demand by state and territory

NSW

2007

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 83,800

Total workforce: 33,093

Teachers in workforce: 3947

1:20 ratio requires: 4190

Teacher shortfall: 241

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds: 35,873

Teachers in LDC workforce: 2879

1:20 ratio requires: 1794

Teacher oversupply: 1085

Preschool

Four-year-olds (according to NCSWS): 54,097

Teachers in preschool workforce: 1069

1:20 ratio requires: 2705

Teacher shortfall: 1636

LSAC and NCSWS figures show no four-year-olds not attending LDC or preschool.

2007 modeling for New South Wales, broken down by sector, shows that while there is a statewide shortage of 241 teachers in both LDC and preschool, there is actually an oversupply of teachers in LDC (according to a 1:20 ratio) and an undersupply of teachers in preschool. This could be explained by state licensing regulations, which require that long day-care centres with more than 30 children hire one teacher, centres with 40 children hire two teachers, centres with 60 children hire three teachers and centres with 80 or more children hire four teachers. Although, consultations with key ECEC stakeholders in NSW indicate that a significant portion of centres have formal or informal exemptions to these teacher requirements. This means that if teacher requirements are enforced in NSW, there may be a need for more teachers in LDC than is indicated by modeling based on official data. In terms of shortages in the preschool/kindergarten sector, preschools on school grounds may be operating at a ratio of less than one teacher to 20 four-year-olds, or teacher shortages could be concentrated in the community kindergarten sector, which may have less of a tradition than school-based preschool of providing teachers at a 1:20 ratio. Neither the school nor the community kindergarten sector is bound by the teacher ratio that governs long day-care centres in NSW.

Therefore, a workforce development strategy for NSW could train 241 teachers to meet statewide targets and introduce initiatives to increase the ratio of teachers to four-year-olds in preschool programs delivered in school and community kindergarten settings. Alternately, to cater for four-year-olds in each individual setting, government could train the additional 1636 teachers required in the school and community kindergarten settings and bind trainees to the sector.

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 90,063

Teachers in workforce: (factoring annual workforce growth rates of 1.6% per annum and the 241 extra teachers in training since 2007): 4370

1:20 ratio requires: 4503

Teacher undersupply: 133

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 91,468

Teachers in workforce: factoring annual workforce growth rates of 1.6% per annum and the 133 extra teachers in training since 2007) 4617

1:20 ratio requires: 4573

Teacher oversupply: 44.

NSW to 2013

According to official data, NSW will not need to train additional teachers by 2013 to meet statewide demand for preschool teachers at a 1:20 ratio. However, preliminary sector modelling for 2007 indicates that there is an oversupply of teachers in LDC and an undersupply of teachers in preschool settings (government and community kindergartens). NSW could consider a PR campaign to attract ECEC teachers to state and community kindergartens. This would require more detailed modelling to determine whether teacher shortages are concentrated in school based preschools or community kindergartens. Any promotional campaign or attempt to bind new graduates to undersupplied sectors would need to be conscious of not overly depleting future teacher supply in the long day-care sector. A more foolproof way of meeting teacher targets in the school or community kindergarten sector would be to formally regulate teacher ratios and upskill the 1636 teacher aides/childcare professionals needed to fill teacher roles in each sector. Consultations with NSW ECEC stakeholders also indicate that a significant number of centers in NSW may not be meeting current teacher requirements, and there may be a greater need for teachers in long day-care than is indicated by official workforce data.

Victoria

2007

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 61,400
Total workforce: 28,184
Teachers in workforce: 2234
1:20 ratio requires: 3070
Teacher shortfall: 836.

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds: 15,603
Teachers in LDC workforce: 684
1:20 ratio requires: 780
Teacher shortfall: 96

Preschool

Preschool attendance numbers in Victoria are substantially higher than four-year-old numbers in the state, indicating double counting in NCSWS in Victoria or a pattern of attendance for three to five-year-olds in Victoria different to national average figures on attendance for these age groups. Therefore, LSAC figures for preschool participation in Victoria will therefore be used to supplement NCSWS preschool attendance figures.

Four-year-olds attending preschool (according to LSAC approximate percentages): 49,120
Teachers in preschool/community kindergarten workforce: 1550
1:20 ratio requires (required according to NCSWS figures): 3930
Teacher shortfall: 2380
Teachers required according to LSAC: 2456
Teacher shortfall: 906
LSAC and NCSWS figures show no four-year-olds not attending LDC or Preschool.

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector
Four-year-olds: 64,285
Teachers in workforce: (factoring annual workforce growth rates of 1.4% per annum and the 836 extra teachers in training since 2007): 3201.
1:20 ratio requires: 3214
Teacher undersupply: 13.

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector
Four-year-olds: 65,012
Teachers in workforce: (factoring annual workforce growth rates of 1.4% per annum and the 13 extra teachers in training since 2007): 3290.
1:20 ratio requires: 3251
Teacher oversupply: 39.

Victoria to 2013

Victoria will need to train an additional 849 teachers by 2013 to meet statewide demand for preschool teachers at a 1:20 ratio.
2007 analysis by sector indicates that there is a greater teacher shortage in the state-subsidised preschool / kindergarten sector than in the long day-care sector. This indicates that the Victorian government will need to promote or bind new graduates to work in these settings. Alternately, to ensure a 1:20 teacher ratio in community kindergartens and school preschools, government has the option of regulating teacher ratios and upskilling 9060-plus VET certificate holders in school and community preschools.

Queensland

2007

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 51,500
Total workforce: 19,622
Teachers in workforce: 1478
1:20 ratio requires: 2575
Teacher shortfall: 1097.

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds in LDC: 18,346
Teachers in LDC workforce: 947
1:20 ratio requires: 917
Teacher shortfall: 30

Preschool

Four-year-olds attending preschool (CSWS): 16,435
EC teachers in preschool workforce: 531
1:20 ratio requires: 822
Teacher shortfall: 291
LSAC and NCSWS figures show 15,719 four-year-olds not attending LDC or preschool
Teachers required for full attendance: 786

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector
Four-year-olds: 56,570
Teachers in workforce: (factoring annual workforce growth rates of 2% per annum and the 1097 extra teachers in training since 2007): 2725
1:20 ratio requires: 2829
Teacher shortfall: 104.

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector
Four-year-olds: 58,571
Teachers in workforce: (factoring annual workforce growth rates of 2% per annum and the 104 extra teachers in training since 2007): 2942.
1:20 ratio requires: 2929
Teacher oversupply: 13.
Queensland needs to train an additional 1201 teachers by 2013 to meet statewide demands for preschool teachers at a ratio of 1:20. Sector analysis for 2007 based on CSWS data shows that teacher shortages are greater in the community preschool sector than the long day-care sector, which may be operating at less than a 1:20 ratio.

South Australia

2007

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 17,500
Total workforce: 7602.
Teachers in workforce: 1226
1:20 ratio requires: 875
Oversupply: 351.

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds in LDC: 4636

EC teachers in LDC workforce: 218

1:20 ratio requires: 232

Teacher shortfall: 14

Preschool

Four-year-olds attending preschool (LSAC): 12,372
Teachers in preschool workforce: 1008
1:20 ratio requires: 619
Teacher oversupply: 389
LSAC and NCSWS figures show no four-year-olds not attending LDC or preschool.

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector
Four-year-olds: 17,683
Teachers in workforce: (factoring in a 1.2% annual workforce growth rate): 1268
1:20 ratio requires: 884
Teacher oversupply: 384

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector
Four-year-olds: 17,646
Teachers in workforce: (factoring in a 1.2% annual workforce growth rate): 1298
1:20 ratio requires: 882
Oversupply: 416.
South Australia to 2013
Modelling indicates that South Australia does not need to train additional teachers by 2013 to meet statewide demands for preschool teachers at a ratio of 1:20. Sector analysis for 2007 indicates there is a small shortage (14) of teachers in the long day-care sector. To ensure a 1:20 teacher ratio for four-year-olds in long day-care, government has the option of upskilling 14 VET certificate holders to degree level.

Western Australia

2007

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 25,200
Total workforce: 11,679.
Teachers in workforce: 2137
1:20 ratio requires: 1260
Teacher oversupply: 877

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds: 4514
Teachers in LDC: 244
1:20 ratio requires: 226
Teacher oversupply: 18

Preschool

Four-year-olds attending preschool according to LSAC: 22,579

Teachers in preschool: 1893

1:20 ratio requires: 1129

Teacher oversupply: 764.

LSAC and NCSWS figures show no four-year-olds not attending LDC or preschool

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 27,502

Teachers in workforce: (factoring an annual workforce growth rate of -1.2%) 2049.

1:20 ratio requires: 1375

Teacher oversupply: 674.

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 28,279

Teachers in workforce (factoring in a -1.2% workforce annual growth rate): 2000

1:20 ratio requires: 1414

Teacher oversupply: 586.

Western Australia to 2013

Western Australia will not need to train additional teachers by 2013 to meet statewide demand for preschool teachers at a 1:20 ratio.

Tasmania

2009

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 6000

Total workforce: 3066

Teachers in workforce: 389

1:20 ratio requires: 300

Teacher oversupply: 89

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds in LDC: 1641

Teachers in LDC: 91

1:20 ratio requires: 82

Teacher oversupply: 9

Preschool

Four-year-olds attending preschool attendance according to LSAC: 4890

Teachers in preschool workforce: 298

1:20 ratio requires: 245

Teacher oversupply: 53

LSAC and NCSWS figures show no four-year-olds not attending LDC or preschool

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 6264

Teachers in workforce: (factoring in a 1.2% annual workforce growth rate) 496.

1:20 ratio requires: 313

Teacher oversupply: 183.

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 6321

Teachers in workforce: (factoring in a 1.2% annual workforce growth rate) 507.

1:20 ratio requires: 316

Teacher oversupply: 191.

Tasmania to 2012

Tasmania will not need to train additional teachers by 2013 to meet statewide demand for preschool teachers at a 1:20 ratio.

ACT

2007

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 4033

Total workforce: 2401.

Teachers in workforce: 110

1:20 ratio requires: 202

Teacher shortfall: 92.

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds: 144

EC teachers in LDC workforce: 95

Teachers required: 7

Teacher oversupply: 68

Preschool

Four-year-olds attending preschool: 438

EC teachers in preschool workforce: 15

1:20 ratio requires: 22

Teacher shortfall: 7

LSAC and NCSWS figures show 3541 four-year-olds not attending LDC or preschool. Full attendance would require an additional 177 teachers. So in 2008, there is a shortage of 116 teachers statewide: 7 in preschool, 109 for four-year-olds currently not participating.

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 4456

Teachers in workforce: (factoring in a 1.5% annual workforce growth rate and the additional 92 teachers in training since 2007) 211.

1:20 ratio requires: 223

Teacher shortfall: 12.

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector

Four-year-olds: 4541

Teachers in workforce: (factoring in a 1.5% annual workforce growth rate and the additional 12 teachers in training since 2007) 230.

1:20 ratio requires: 227

Teacher oversupply: 3.

The ACT to 2013

The ACT needs to train 104 teachers to meet statewide preschool teacher demand by 2013. Analysis by sector for 2007 indicates that small shortages (7 teachers) are concentrated in the school and community preschool rather than the long day-care sector. Government will also need to make more teachers available (approximately 109) when access issues are addressed in the ACT.

Northern Territory

2008

Statewide

Four-year-olds: 3600

Total workforce: 924

Teachers in workforce: 25

1:20 ratio requires: 180

Shortfall: 155.

By sector

LDC

Four-year-olds in LDC: 588

Teachers in LDC workforce: 21

1:20 ratio requires: 29.

Teacher shortfall: 8

Preschool

Four-year-olds attending preschool (NCSWS): 338

Teachers in preschool workforce: 4

1:20 ratio requires: 17

Teacher shortfall: 13

LSAC and NCSWS figures show 2624 four-year-olds aren't attending LDC or preschool. Their attendance would require an additional 132 teachers.

2010

This projection is statewide rather than by sector.

Four-year-olds: 3827

Teachers in workforce: (factoring in the additional 155 teacher in training since 2007 and an annual workforce growth rate of -1.5%) 172

1:20 ratio requires: 191

Teacher shortfall: 19

2012

This projection is statewide rather than by sector.

Four-year-olds: 3976

Teachers in workforce: (factoring in the additional 19 teacher in training since 2007 and an annual workforce growth rate of -1.5%) 186.

1:20 ratio requires: 199

Teacher shortfall: 13.

The Northern Territory to 2013

The NT needs to upskill 187 diploma holders by 2013 to meet statewide demand for preschool teachers at a 1:20 ratio. Analysis for 2007 by sector indicates that teacher shortages are fairly similar in both long day-care and school and community based preschool settings. Government will also need to train additional teachers (approximately 132) to support increased access for four-year-olds in the NT.

Three or four-year trained teachers

The available data on children's services workers and university enrolments and completions provides no distinction between three and four-year trained teachers. While there is a requirement for four-year trained teachers in primary schools, ECEC teachers are able to be three-year university trained. A review of ECEC university course offerings nationally indicates that while there is a preference for three-year ECEC degrees to be phased out, approximately 50 per cent of ECEC degrees still offer a three-year option.

Graduate numbers¹⁸ do make a distinction between ECEC and primary or general 'teaching' graduates. In 2005, approximately 17.8 per cent of teaching graduates were ECEC trained. These findings, combined with information gained through consultations with state and territory governments, indicate that ensuring teacher supply for a national universal preschool program that is both ECEC-focused and four-year trained will be a challenge.

Both an early childhood focus and length of study are crucial influences on the quality of care and education ECEC teachers are able to offer young children. This is one key reason why upskilling Diploma holders to four-year ECEC degrees through the LHMU's proposed upskilling model, will be the best guarantee that sufficient numbers of appropriately trained teachers are available to implement the Commonwealth's universal preschool initiative.

Figure 4. ECEC, primary and general teaching graduates for 2005.

2005	Teacher Education	ECEC	Primary
NSW	2964	1530	2188
VIC	621	315	1849
QLD	1231	701	1663
WA	266	358	1725
SA	1009	240	377
TAS	456	0	0
NT	260	17	38
ACT	0	41	156
National	6807	3202	7996

A comparative wages bill – upgrading diploma holders to teachers

The following wage calculations are based on a comparison of enterprise agreements in the government school sector and the private long day-care sector, which provide the current rates for teaching staff working in long day-care and school preschool settings. Agreement comparisons are contained in Appendix 1.

LHMU would only support the upgrading of Diploma holders to a three-year ECEC degree as a short-term, transitional budget measure and as part of a non-negotiable step on the path to a four-year ECEC degree. Mechanisms to ensure that pathways students progress from a three to four year university qualification would need to be developed. LHMU shares Early Childhood Australia's position that the goal of ECEC skilling plans must be the provision of sufficient four-year university educated ECEC teachers to provide preschool programs for children in the year before school in all children's services settings.

As the below financial modeling illustrates, there is minimal difference in the cost to Government of supporting the full upgrade to four-year ECEC university qualifications in the first instance.

The annual wages cost to the sector of funding 2341 additional teachers nationally to provide preschool programs 'across the long day' in long day-care centres, – by upgrading diploma holders to three-year trained teacher level – would be \$706,982.

The annual wages cost to the sector of finding 2341 additional teachers to provide preschool programs 'across the long day' in long day-care centres, – by upgrading diploma holders to four-year trained teacher level – would be \$7,595,375.

The annual wages cost to the sector of 'parachuting in' an additional 2341 three-year trained teachers to long day-care settings to provide 15 hours of preschool would be \$32,936,992.

The annual wages cost to the sector of 'parachuting in' an additional 2341 four-year trained teachers to long day-care settings to provide 15 hours of preschool would be \$35,520,140.

The annual wages cost to the sector of employing 2341 additional three-year trained teachers full-time in long day-care, necessary to ensure all four-year-olds have universal access to universal preschool would be \$87,831,979.

The annual wage costs to the sector of employing 2341 additional four-year trained teachers full-time in long day-care, which would be necessary to ensure all four-year-olds have universal access to preschool would be \$94,720,372.

As is clear from the above costings, upskilling diploma holders already working full-time in long day-care centres, to give all four-year-olds in long day-care access to the equivalent of fifteen hours of preschool, will save the sector significant amounts of money, up to \$94,013,390 in wages each year. This is because upskilling current diploma holders to teacher level means State and Territory Government's could subsidise the wage difference between diploma and teacher levels, rather than a full teacher wage for between 15 and 40 hours per week.

The cost savings generated by upskilling diploma holders to deliver universal preschool can be used to provide access to study for low-paid diploma workers, and create a sustainable upgrade in skills in the early childhood workforce by upgrading replacement workers from Certificate III to Diploma level and introducing a Certificate III mandatory minimum qualification in early childhood settings.

Barriers to training: time and money

Childcare workers face specific and significant barriers to participation in formal training. Across the sector, 97 per cent of childcare workers are women, their average age is 35, and a significant proportion of them do not hold any formal qualifications. In the framework of the lifecycle discourse, childcare workers are seen to be “non-traditional learners”.

Their average age means that many of them have been outside of the formal educational system for a long time. Due to “lifecycle” this group also have greater life commitments, particularly caring commitments, than “traditional” students straight out of school.

Barriers to participation in higher educational institutes are particularly acute, as the lack of traditional entry-qualifications compounds problems stemming from the full-time, campus based mode of traditional education delivery, which does not meet the needs of those outside of a traditional learning background.

Louise Watson’s study of childcare training in Australia¹⁹ found high rates of attrition among children’s service workers studying at VET and university levels. The main reasons for this were a shortage of time for study and difficulties in covering course fees. Watson’s study found that for mature age women, working full-time, often with family commitments in addition to their work and study, the time and financial pressures of study often prevented course completion.

Because of age, gender and socio-economic status, prospective teacher education students are likely to be more sensitive to fee levels than students studying in many other fields of education.

The 2006 National Children’s Services Workforce Survey found that 40 per cent of childcare workers “strongly agreed” with the statement: I am interested in furthering my career in the sector. A further 21 per cent of childcare workers “agreed” with the statement. Considering that 96 per cent of respondents “strongly agreed” that childcare workers weren’t paid enough, 86 per cent saw a need to improve the standing of the profession in the community, and 72 per cent found their job stressful, this displays a significant commitment to children’s services

When asked what prevented them from undertaking further

training, the most common response from childcare workers (66%) was that further study was not worthwhile because the resulting wage increase was too small. The two most common responses from childcare workers who wanted to study but reconsidered, was that they didn’t have enough spare time (62%) for study and the cost of study was too high (60%).

The impacts of barriers like time and money, which prevent non-traditional learners from accessing education, are demonstrated in higher education equity reports. The 2005 Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education argues that there are “serious issues” across the whole higher education sector in attracting students from diverse backgrounds.

The Higher Education report for the 2003 to 2005 Triennium²⁰ showed that students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous backgrounds, non-English speaking backgrounds and rural and remote areas now comprise a smaller proportion of the university population than in the 1990s. In terms of supporting students from diverse backgrounds to enter the teaching profession, Australia has gone backwards during the past decade.

The ACDE recommends the introduction of “targeted commonwealth scholarships to boost the diversity and quality of teacher education candidates.”²¹

A study of the participation and exclusion of non-traditional learners in 10 OECD countries (including Australia) found that there were a number of institutional factors that impacted upon the participation rates of this group in higher education. This included Institutional flexibility with regard to the organisation of studies, flexible admission for those without traditional entry qualifications, the availability of recognition of prior learning, flexible modes of study and financial assistance and other support.²²

Because of skills shortages in childcare and the comparative attractiveness of work in long day-care or community kindergartens, compared to a school-based preschool, government will face significant challenges attracting the teacher numbers required to deliver universal preschool. By upskilling full-time, committed, VET-qualified workers in long day-care and community kindergartens, federal and state

governments can ensure sufficient teacher supply to meet Federal Government preschool commitments by 2013.

Upskilling qualified childcare workers who are already attached full-time to a long day-care centre or community kindergarten, will also ensure working parents can access a preschool program no matter what days their four-year-old attends children's services. An upskilling strategy will also contribute to creating a career path for early childhood workers, reducing turnover in the ECEC sector and improving the diversity of students participating in higher education.

Yet, because female, low-paid childcare workers fit predominately into the category of non-tradition learner, government needs to consider offering additional training support to enable experienced, VET-qualified childcare workers to articulate into teacher education. A national upskilling strategy for Children's Services diploma holders needs to address the two main barriers to non-traditional learner's participation in higher education: time and money.

Time

Because 97 per cent of childcare workers are female and the average age of workers is 35, finding the time to study while combining full-time work and family responsibilities can be a significant barrier to training in the childcare sector.

The Victorian government funds kindergarten programs in multiple children's services settings. Because of its commitment to provide preschool programs in long day-care and the shortage of teachers available for work in the sector, the Victorian government has introduced a scholarship program aimed at upskilling diploma holders in long day-care to teacher level.

Victoria's Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships for Pathway Students Scheme offers a package of supports to childcare workers and the centres that employ them to overcome the financial and time constraints that prevent childcare workers from furthering their qualifications.

The Scholarships for Pathways Students Scheme offers: \$6000 to \$12,000 to students over two years to contribute to course costs.

Payments to centres to cover the costs of 20 days backfill, to support students in completing their practicum

Assistance with gaining credit with approved institutions towards a four-year ECEC bachelor degree

Literacy support while studying

Mentoring programs for graduates within long day-care settings

Scholarship graduates are bound to work in a long day-care

setting for two years. While 20 days paid time for diploma students to study fails to offer sufficient release time for students to finish their practicum, which on average takes 45 days, it is a significant start to overcoming time constraints for full-time workers with caring responsibilities.

Victoria will offer 100 scholarships in 2008-09 with \$6000 contributions to course fees and 100 scholarships in 2008-09 with \$12,000 contributions to course fees.

Money

The 1500 additional university places created by the Australian Government in the 2008-09 Federal Budget is a significant step to providing sufficient university places for diploma holders to articulate to by 2013.

However, the creation of general, subsidised places offers no HECS-incentive to low-paid childcare workers who earn just \$15 an hour at AQF Certificate III level and \$19 per hour at AQF Diploma level.

There is already limited to no incentive in terms of wage increases for childcare workers to upskill from diploma to teacher level. Without an additional university-training subsidy for low-paid workers, HECS repayments will add to disincentives for childcare workers to further their career in early childhood. Under the 2008-09 HECS repayment rates, an ECEC teacher on an already low salary of \$41,867 would lose \$1,675 from their pay each year.

Extending the 50 per cent HECS subsidy, currently offered to students committed to working in regional areas, to low-paid childcare workers with a diploma and a number of years of service in the sector, will assist in overcoming disincentives for childcare workers to upgrade their qualifications.

Upgrading 2341 diploma holders to a four-year ECEC degree to meet universal preschool teacher requirements, would cost government approximately \$3,839,240 per year over five years.

LHMU proposes that all 2341 diploma holders be supported to upgrade to a four-year ECEC university degree. LHMU would only support the upgrading of Diploma holders to a three-year ECEC degree as transitional budget measure.

A Commonwealth / State ECEC Pathways Scholarship

Subsidising backfill costs for long day-care centres and kindergartens/preschools will be crucial to ensuring experienced, full-time childcare workers have the time to complete the practicum components of ECEC teacher education and some time to attend to further studies. Without this supported study time, there is a risk that experienced childcare workers, many with out-of-work caring responsibilities, will miss out on the new ECEC places government has made available.

This could have costs in terms of government's ability to ensure sufficient teacher supply for its universal preschool commitments. It also raises significant equity concerns. Without recognition of the skills, potential and valuable contribution of experienced childcare workers, there is a risk that the gap between low-paid, so-called 'care' workers and an expanded, higher-paid teacher class will widen. Such a gap mirrors and exacerbates the separation between 'education' and 'care' in Australian ECEC and will move the ECEC sector even further away from the creation of the career path needed to make skills and training investment in the ECEC workforce sustainable.

The LHMU proposes that the Commonwealth offers support for a Commonwealth/State Pathways Scholarship to upgrade the qualifications of diploma holders to ECEC bachelor-level by 2013. This scholarship program will include a 50 per cent HECS subsidy for experienced, low-paid childcare workers, and backfill payments to centres to enable diploma holders one paid day-off per week to complete

university studies and/or complete their practicum.

Backfill payments to long day-care centres and community kindergartens/preschools would cost Commonwealth and State Governments approximately \$17,424,063 per year, or \$69,696,252 over four years.

Staff to support backfill

While a paid day-off to meet study and practicum requirements will enable diploma holders to access university training places and upgrade their qualifications to lead preschool programs in their centres by 2013, children's service centres still need to be able to access staff to backfill the diploma holders position for one day per week.

While attracting even unqualified staff members to childcare may prove challenging for some centres, particularly in rural and remote areas, LHMU modelling indicates that even very small improvements in retention in children's services will ensure the sector has sufficient staff to backfill diploma holders. Each year the children's services sector loses 32 per cent or 34,348 staff nationally. To find the 2341 staff needed to backfill diploma holders participating in a Commonwealth Pathways Scholarship, the sector would need to improve retention by just 6.8 percent per year.

The whole of workforce skills strategy proposed by the LHMU should result in sufficient improvements to turnover in the children's services workforce to provide the staff needed to backfill diploma holders.

Articulation between VET and HE

To ensure the success of Commonwealth/State Pathways Scholarships for experienced childcare workers, Australia's training sector must have the capacity to efficiently articulate AQF Diploma holders into a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and Care. A review of articulation between VET and Higher Education (HE) in the early childhood training sector indicates that there is the potential for articulation to run smoothly for a Commonwealth Pathways Scholarship pilot program. Beyond a pilot program for workers to upskill under the universal preschool initiative, there are necessary reforms to the articulation processes that would support the rollout of articulation options to larger numbers of early childhood workers. These reforms are outlined below.

Appendix 5 contains a table outlining formal articulation arrangements between VET and universities for early childhood training in Australia. Thirty-one universities in Australia offer a bachelor degree in early childhood education. Of these:

- Six have a formal articulation arrangement offering credit for diploma holders in a three-year ECEC degree for the 0-5 age group.
- Three have a formal articulation arrangement offering credit for diploma holders in a four-year ECEC degree for the 0-5 age group.
- Eleven have a formal articulation arrangement offering credit for diploma holders in a four-year ECEC degree for early childhood and primary school age groups.
- Fourteen of those universities with formal articulation arrangements for diploma holders offer distance/online education options for students working full-time or living in rural and remote areas, with one university (University of South Australia) offering a tailored distance education program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

There is therefore sufficient training sector capacity to negotiate support for a piloted number of students to articulate from Diploma to Degree level. Initially, this may be into a three-year ECEC degree in some states and territories, depending on how much government wants to spend to ensure access to four-year ECEC degrees in all states and territories. LHMU has explored the option of articulation

into a three-year ECEC degree where necessary, as a transition to a national program of articulation to four year degrees nationally, with the option of a top-up year for students that have transitioned into the three-year degree but would like to further their studies or consider a move into primary school teaching later in their career.

In terms of future reforms to make articulation from VET to Higher Education easier for the early childhood workforce, there are various outcomes LHMU would support in relation to the current Higher Education Funding Review. In response to point 3.4, 'Connecting with other education and training sectors' in relation to the early childhood workforce, the LHMU would support:

- The creation of new, national articulation agreements by industry or sector. While the Australian Qualifications Framework offers rough guidelines for articulation, there needs to be a formal requirement for key training players in each industry/sector to come together and invest in an articulation agreement for their sector.
- Industry articulation agreements should be negotiated by Deans of Education and VET executive in the early childhood sector and introduce a formal requirement on all Higher Education providers to offer formal articulation arrangements for VET students.
- Formal industry articulation arrangements should include agreement on the provision of academic literacy courses for students without experience of university-level education. The work of Louise Watson gives clear guidelines as to why academic literacy courses need to be strategically integrated into articulation agreements, rather than provided on an inconsistent, ad-hoc basis.
- Practicum requirements for diploma holders who already work full-time in an early childhood setting and are upgrading to a degree should be reviewed. While it will be beneficial for upskilling students to gain some experience teaching in a different setting to their full-time centre, there is not the same need for workers already delivering programs full-time in centres to use practicum to gain experience of delivering programs in a centre setting – they already have this experience and this needs to be recognised by universities.



Teacher Registration

Teacher registration for ECEC teachers has been raised in LHMU consultations with training stakeholders and state departments. State and territory teacher registration boards function primarily to register teaching graduates to work in state schools. On the whole, teacher registration boards do not offer registration to ECEC teachers. In some states graduates of four-year ECEC degrees can apply for registration with state registration boards, if their qualification is deemed to have sufficient focus on education for primary school aged children.

Advocates for ECEC teachers in NSW have lobbied for some time to allow ECEC teachers to be registered with the state teacher registration board, a campaign primarily motivated by a desire to see ECEC teachers and the early childhood sector given the same status as school teachers and the primary and secondary education sectors.

While allowing ECEC teacher registration with state teacher

registration boards would offer some recognition of the equal status of ECEC teaching relative to primary teaching, government will face significant challenges unifying state teacher registration requirements to ensure allowances for ECEC university modules and practicum and supervision environments. Nor would reforming state teacher registration processes to allow ECEC teacher registration offer any form of professional recognition and registration for the broader ECEC workforce.

The LHMU proposes that any efforts to create a formal registration system for ECEC teachers be pursued through the creation of an early childhood professional association that is able to register and advocate for all ECEC professionals, accredit ECEC course content and support ECEC career paths by coordinating training pathways between VET and Higher Education.



A whole of workforce strategy

While providing Commonwealth ECEC Pathways Scholarships will ensure sufficient ECEC teacher supply to implement government's universal preschool commitment by 2013, a whole of workforce strategy is needed to create a solid skills base within the early learning workforce. A workforce strategy with a focus beyond small increases in teacher supply will certainly be necessary to support government's vision of quality ECEC provision through a national network of integrated Early Learning Centres.

Thirty to 45 per cent of the current ECEC workforce has no formal qualifications.²³ There is no national mandatory minimum qualification for ECEC workers. Queensland is the only state with a compulsory entry-level qualification, where childcare workers require an AQF Certificate III in Children's Services to work in long day-care.

The introduction of national mandatory minimum qualifications in Australian ECEC will be a crucial step in creating a genuine career path in children's services and the 'iron

triangle' of inputs required to guarantee quality education and care for families.

While phasing in mandatory minimum qualifications in children's services will add costs to government's existing commitment to universal preschool, Australian and international research accepts that staff qualifications are an essential requirement for quality ECEC. Creating a qualifications base for the ECEC workforce will be crucial to ensuring the substantial investment made by government in children's services delivers and supports government's human capital agenda.

LHMU supports the introduction of an AQF Certificate III in Children's Services as a national mandatory minimum qualification for the early childhood workforce. While many sector advocates rightly argue that a minimum qualification for childcare workers should be higher than the Certificate III level, with 30 to 45 per cent of the current workforce without any formal qualification, introduction of a Certificate III minimum qualification seems the most realistic goal.

Sustainable supply: Skilling Australia

Providing formal qualifications for the approximately 17,137 workers in long day-care and 7,479 workers in state and community preschools, without early childhood qualifications, at first appears daunting. Yet government has already committed to the provision of 8000 new VET places for children's services workers, and the Skilling Australia initiative, which aims to deliver 630,000 new training places over the next five years, includes a commitment to extend two-thirds of these places to people who are currently employed, but need to upgrade their skills.

This means that low, to no-cost training places can be extended to unqualified childcare workers through initiatives that have already been committed to and budgeted for nationally. The only additional budget item necessary to

ensure the smooth extension of these new VET places to existing workers, will be funding for the introduction of a nationally coordinated system of Recognition of Prior Learning for the early childhood workforce.

To ensure efforts are made at state and territory level to extend two-thirds of Skilling Australia places to existing workers seeking to upgrade their qualifications, LHMU supports the introduction of targets for existing workers within Commonwealth-State VET bilateral funding agreements. Ensuring formal commitment to coordinate provision of Skilling Australia places to existing workers in industries facing serious skills shortages will ensure that government's new Skilling Australia places go towards supporting COAG's human capital agenda.



A national system of Recognition of Prior Learning

Introduction of an AQF Certificate III mandatory minimum qualification in Children's Services, and extending new VET places to unqualified childcare workers under the Skilling Australia program, will require the support of an accessible and efficient, nationally consistent system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

LHMU has undertaken extensive consultations with training experts to determine what needs to happen to make RPL effective for children's service workers with extensive experience but no formal qualifications.

Limits in quantitative data make it difficult to conclude how widely RPL is accessed in Australia. Figure 6, taken from the 2007 OECD background report on RPL for Australia, indicates that some 3.6% of VET students were granted RPL in publicly funded VET courses in 2005²⁴. This number has remained fairly stable from 2001 to 2005. These figures do

not account for RPL granted in non-publically funded VET courses, or for partial RPL granted to students completing select VET modules, rather than full qualifications.

The uptake of RPL remains greater for students enrolling in higher level VET qualifications than lower level qualifications. Those who take advantage of RPL are also typically those who have more experience of education in formal settings. This profile raises some concerns for the childcare workforce, in which large proportions of workers have no formal qualifications and fit into the category of non-traditional learners. This is the group of workers for whom RPL was originally intended, but who still have the greatest difficulties accessing RPL.

Barriers to RPL for low-paid workers without experience within the formal education sector include:

- Awareness that RPL is an option

Figure 6. Proportion of students granted RPL in publicly-funded VET, by qualification level and age, 2001 to 2005

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Qualification levels					
diploma & above	10.1	11.0	10.5	10.0	8.9
Certificate III & above	6.3	6.7	6.6	5.5	6.3
Certificate I & II	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.8	2.2
Other programmes	.7	.6	.4	.3	0.4
Age Groups					
15-19 years	2.1	2.5	2.3	2.1	2.0
20-24 years	4.6	4.7	4.5	4.2	3.7
25-39 years	5.0	5.1	4.8	4.4	4.5
40-64 years	4.3	4.7	4.5	4.1	4.4
Other including age unknown	1.4	1.4	1.0	1.0	0.9
All students per cent	4.0	4.2	3.9	3.6	3.6
All students	1679.2	1.682.9	1.717.8	1.595.2	1641.3

Source: Australian vocational education and training statistics: National 2001-2005 VET provider collections, unpublished statistics

RPL systems seem to be least successful at involving non-traditional learners when all of the onus is on a low-paid worker to approach a learning institution to receive RPL. For low-paid workers with no experience of the formal post-secondary education sector, the knowledge and confidence required to approach an Registered Training Organisation (RTO), enroll in a course and ask for 'Recognition of Prior Learning' is a big ask.

The Australian Qualifications Framework requires that RTO's offer students information on RPL when they enroll, but this approach assumes that non-traditional learners will approach RTO's in large numbers to enroll in post-secondary qualifications. Providing brochures or internet resources is not the best way to reach a low-paid worker and inform them about their options through RPL. Bowman et al (2003)²⁵ found in their review of Australian RPL systems that there remains widespread lack of knowledge among workers about RPL and that 'word of mouth', through work mates, employers and individual teachers remained the most common way workers heard about RPL.

- The complexity of RPL processes

RPL assessment processes continue to be viewed as complex and time-intensive, for students and providers. Assessors continue to indicate that the time required to complete RPL assessments is a burden, which in some cases falls beyond their designated workloads. For students, traditional RPL processes, which rely on collecting evidence to demonstrate competencies, are experienced as a daunting, time-consuming, retrospective paper chase.²⁶ RPL assessors report that students are unsure about how to collect evidence to prove they are competent. Non-traditional learners, including childcare workers, have been described as lacking confidence and undervaluing the skills that their daily work tasks involve.²⁷

- Cost

In 2006, COAG agreed to allow states and territories to claim up to 100 per cent of the nominal funded training hours for all competencies awarded through RPL. This was a significant enabler compared with a prior system which funded RPL at a level lower than training provision.

Yet Australian reviews indicate that when RPL processes involve extensive mentoring and site visits for workplace observations, even 100% of nominal training provision funding may not be sufficient to cover the full costs of RPL. In general, additional direct and indirect costs to RTO's are born by the institution or the student, with market rates for RPL setting applicants back around \$500.²⁸

Barriers to RPL have been a significant topic of research for the past five years. While changes to RPL process have yet to be implemented on a large scale, there is nonetheless sufficient knowledge and precedents in Australia's VET sector for government to determine what is required to make RPL a success for childcare workers.

Innovative approaches to RPL in Australia

"Policy needs to promote the formation of innovative mechanisms that facilitate training opportunities in situations involving non-standard workers."

John Buchanan, Workplace Research Centre, Sydney University.

The Victorian Department of Human Services Disabilities Training Strategy

Victoria has a good track record with RPL, due in part to the accessible model of RPL (or RCC – Recognition of Current Competencies) which has been developed by the Victorian Community Services and Health Industry Training Board. (CSHITAB) Designed for a sector with a highly experienced and feminised workforce, a significant proportion of whom do not have formal qualifications, the Victorian CSH ITAB 'Recognising Competency' model uses primarily interviews and workplace observation to assess worker competencies.²⁹ The model recognises that key competencies in the community services sector are based on interpersonal skills, which are best assessed through conversations and observations of a candidate's current, everyday work, rather than a paper-based, historical approach.³⁰

When a government department got behind this approach to Recognising Competency and played a coordinating role to ensure low-paid workers in a community services sector industry actually knew about and had access to RCC and formal training opportunities, RCC was implemented with significant success.

The Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-12³¹ came about due to cooperative leadership between government, training providers and unions in Victoria's Disability Services sector. Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of disability staff in the government sector who were qualified or undertaking qualifications at the AQF Certificate IV level increased from 52 per cent to 93 per cent.³²

RMIT university, Victoria's Office for TAFE, the Department of Human Services and Victoria's Health and Community Services Union project managed the training plan. Course costs were covered by a combination of state VET and Commonwealth Traineeship money, with DHS covering some upfront TAFE fees for students that couldn't qualify for state or commonwealth subsidies.

Assessors from nine RTOs went into the workplace and developed an individual training plan for all unqualified workers. RCC based on conversation, mentoring and workplace observation was also offered to all unqualified workers. Training onsite managers to become workplace assessors was a crucial part of ensuring a training culture within workplaces and added to the creation of career paths for employees.³³ All unqualified workers were supported through RCC processes to gain a Certificate IV minimum qualification.

Such a successful upskilling project did not result from

goodwill alone. Office for TAFE Project Manager Helen Smith and RMIT's Christine Robertson stressed that the introduction of legislated mandatory minimum qualifications in Victoria's Disability Services sector created the motivation on the part of government and employers to get behind a successful training transition for a low-paid, highly feminised workforce. In 2004, Victoria's CSH ITAB began work on customising the RCC model for Children's Services workers.

Trades Recognition in NSW

Trades in NSW is an also industry in which stakeholders have cooperated to make RPL more accessible for unqualified workers. The NSW Department of Education and Training has made the Vocation Training Tribunal within the department formally responsible for assessing and recognising trade skills. The tribunal consists of representative from industry, RTO's and the NSW Commissioner for Vocational Training, who assist applicants in accessing RPL for four year or more of trades experience. The tribunal also offers workplace assessments.³⁴

The Australian Construction Industry

Australia's construction industry is highly dependent on non-standard labour in the form of contract workers. Because of this, contractors, managers, unions and industry organisations became increasingly concerned about the future of training in the industry. Contractors were unlikely to shoulder the full burden of training themselves, and no one employer felt they would get returns from investing in training for their contract labour. On-site safety became a particular concern.

The result was Construction Training Australia (CTA), a tripartite industry training body established in 1996 to regulate and formalise training in the construction industry. Through CTA, the CFMEU, the Master Builders Association and other construction industry players work together to create a training framework for the industry. This has involved mapping skill needs in line with the construction process, streamlining existing trade training, introducing training levies to underpin training provision and forming union training companies in each state, to enable joint union-employer contributions to training funding and delivery.

A key service offered by Construction Training Australia is coordination of RPL processes for the industry. CTA offers applicants assistance in preparing RPL applications and organisers assessors to conduct on-the-job assessments of competencies. The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund, supported by industry training levies, covers 45 per cent of the cost of RPL. Workers pay the remaining \$320.³⁵ The process takes between three and 12 weeks.

Hospitality, construction and automotive trades in the ACT

The Department of Education and Training in the ACT is piloting an alternative skills recognition process in construction, cooking/hospitality and automotive trades which offers workers \$500 grants to access RPL processes³⁶ with an RTO to qualify for a Certificate III or trade qualification level. While this initiative doesn't offer coordination of the RPL process or ensure that workers in these industries are aware of and supported through RPL opportunities, it does involve government/industry cooperation to cover the cost of RPL for workers in industries facing skills shortages.

A successful approach to RPL in NSW childcare

The International Child Care College (ICCC) is a private RTO in NSW. Inspired by innovative assessment RPL models being used in New Zealand, it decided to pilot similar methods for childcare workers within its own organisation.

"Story of practice" assessments are used for those with existing child care qualifications and more than three years experience, wishing to gain further training. Specifically this applies to those with a Certificate III to a Diploma or from a Diploma to an Advanced Diploma.

The method centres around a written account of student's story of learning and experience within their own workplace and seeks self reflection on the tasks, skills and underpinning knowledge they have developed in order to perform their work role. Candidates are required to reflect on their acquired skills and knowledge and record this in the form of a 'Story of Practice' which provides an overview of their journey as an early childhood educator.

Students participate in a group evidence presentation forum, which include 3 other candidates and 1 or 2 assessors. Each candidate presents their story of practice and evidence to the group. This allows for an interactive forum where, in turn, all candidates are able to ask questions and seek clarification. The dynamic this group context provides a number of different outcomes. Workers get to share their knowledge, ask questions, and get feedback from their peers. The process enables them to reflect on their own skills and knowledge and foster critical awareness. It is also an empowering process.

"We've had a lot of people come to us with previous experience of RPL and they say things like "it's too hard" and "I can't do it". It's very much a mindset of childcare workers as they are so undervalued, they do not have much confidence in their ability to articulate their specialised knowledge. They do not recognise what they do as a skill set".

Assessor at the International Child Care College

Students are allowed to use whatever props or evidence they



need during the presentation and are supported in the preparation of this by the assessors in the weeks between enrolling in a course and signing up for an RPL assessment, and the presentation itself. The ICCC explained that they have an open door policy, and stay in contact with students via email and phone. There is one preparatory meeting between students in a group and the assessor, which is usually face to face.

At the start of the process the ICCC send out an information pack to students identifying evidence that may be used to support their application, which includes providing papers from their previous qualifications. This is similar to a portfolio, but differs in that competencies which share similar outcomes are grouped together, rather than listing outcomes for every single unit individually and getting candidates to respond to each one individually.

"We give candidates the tools to present their evidence as best they can. Clustering the competencies makes it less daunting for the candidates. I tell them that one piece of evidence can be used for more than one cluster; however it is really my job as an assessor to look at how that evidence is clustered and whether it meets the competencies, not the other way around".

Karen Kearns, Director of and assessor at the ICCC

The final step in the 'story of practice' is a workplace visit by the assessor which is part workplace assessment and observation, but also provides an opportunity to ask the centre

director and the student questions, and provide some face to face feedback on the process.

"I see the process as exchanging information and working together with the candidate to tease out their skills and knowledge. The process can't be rushed. Candidates need to feel in control and valued."

Assessor at the ICCC

As this pilot project has only been running for a year, only a few students have successfully completed RPL. The RTO is not funded to provide the assessments and passes the \$500 cost on to students. This pays for the entire process.

In assessing the success of 'story of practice' method, the ICCC were keen to point out that measuring the success of RPL is difficult and contextualised. For them it has been a success as they were keen to move away from a portfolio only approach which students found "overwhelming" and "demoralising", to a supportive system that provided a customised approach.

In those terms the ICCC measure their assessments as successful.

"The feedback we have is extremely positive, there is a positive attitudinal shift during the process, people get confidence in their skills and are empowered and feel valued. This gives them confidence with the continuation of their studies and commitment to their studies".

Karen Kearns, Director of and assessor at the ICCC



A national training board for ECEC workers

Australian research and best-practice indicates clearly what framework needs to be put in place to ensure the low-paid, highly feminised workforce in Australia's early childhood sector has access to Recognition of Prior Learning opportunities. Ideally, RPL needs to be coordinated by a third party, industry organisation that includes representatives from all major training stakeholders within the sector. This body should be responsible for:

- ensuring that all workers have knowledge of their opportunities through RPL
- assist students in preparing RPL applications
- organise RPL assessment based on professional conversations and on-the-job observation of competencies
- provide scholarships and funding support for low-paid workers to access RPL processes.

Such a framework will be crucial to enabling introduction of a qualifications floor in Australia's early childhood sector, which will be central to creating a sustainable career path for early childhood workers, providing families with quality care and education services and meeting government's human capital agenda.

The LHMU proposes consideration of the creation of a national Early Childhood Education and Care training board. This will enable cooperation between key training stakeholders in the heavily subsidised early childhood sector, which provides essential services to Australian children and working families. Potentially linked to a national professional registration body for Australia's early childhood workforce, this training board would be tasked with responsibility for coordinating RPL processes for the 30 to 45 per cent of early childhood workers.

Upskilling case studies

New Zealand and Queensland are the two main jurisdictions to have introduced mandatory minimum qualifications for the early childhood workforce and created Recognition of Prior Learning opportunities for unqualified childcare workers in the transition to regulating qualification requirements. The two case studies below consider the success of early childhood workforce upskilling projects in New Zealand and Queensland.

RPL in New Zealand

In 2001 the government of New Zealand published a 10 year policy strategy for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector called *“Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki”*. The two most prominent policy initiatives within this document were the governments commitment to provide 20 hours of free pre-school to every 4 year old, and regulation that demanded every worker in an ECEC centre to be a qualified and registered teacher by 2012.

Students who have a depth of competency and knowledge can cover several topics in a single conversation, allowing for the presentation of a vaster body of material than may be possible in a single portfolio.

A secondary benefit to assessors using this approach is that concerns over plagiarism that may exist during portfolio assessments are removed, and they can be sure that the richness and thoroughness of knowledge is the students own.

Teacher registration

The New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) hold responsibility for teacher registration and deciding which qualifications meet registration requirements. They determined that in order to qualify for teacher registration, applicants had to hold one of the following 2 qualifications:

- Bachelor of Education (ECE) – 3 years full time study
- Diploma of Teaching (ECE) – 3 years full time study

In 1996 policy changes in educational provision meant that unlike Australia, a number of institutions outside of “traditional universities” could provide Diploma courses. Presently there are 21 institutions across New Zealand that offer the Diploma, and these include Polytechnics (which are equivalent to TAFE), Institutes of Technologies (which offer a mix of vocational and tertiary educational courses), private colleges and universities³⁹.

At the time more than 60% of the workforce was deemed to be “unqualified” either because they possessed no qualifications, or because those qualifications did not meet NZTC registration standards⁴⁰.

In order to encourage staff in the sector to gain the necessary qualifications for registration, the Government funded a system

of Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). The aim of this system was to award credits towards a Diploma or Bachelor course so that students could skip modules that they had prior knowledge of and shorten the length of the 3 year courses.

For cross-credit assessments, the NZTC along with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority created a points system for qualifications outside of the NZTC approved Bachelor and Diploma courses. Institutions had the final say in how much credit was awarded to the participant within NZTC guidelines. These stipulated that a maximum of 2 years credit could be awarded, forcing all applicants to complete the last year of study, and qualifications older than 6 years were not recognised as applicable for credit.

Formal articulation in New Zealand between universities and other providers does not exist, despite the existence of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

One of the aims of the NQF was to assess prior learning against unit standards, but each individual university decided the amount of credit to be awarded for their courses. This resulted in massive differences in credit awarded by each institution.

“Universities have consistently opposed the idea of formal articulation schemes because of a perceived threat to their autonomy.”⁴¹

Funding processes

The Ministry of Education funded APL in 2001 up to NZ\$1,000 (A\$786 at time of writing) per person, which was increased to NZ\$1,500 the next year.

Originally the Government funded APL in all institutions with approved courses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there were concerns with the efficacy of some institutions providing assessments (specifically the private colleges). Since 2005 the Government limited direct funding to the following 5 institutions to provide this service for free to all applicants:

- University of Canterbury College of Education
- Manukau Institute of Technology
- Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa / NZ Childcare Association
- The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
- Victoria University Wellington College of Education⁴²

Costs of assessments at the above institutions vary widely depending on the student, how much credit they are applying for, and the type of assessment that the university employs⁴³. The Victoria University of Wellington College of Education attested that due to these variations they worked out an average cost of NZ\$1,650 (A\$1,300), which is not far off the government benchmark. The University of Canterbury College of Education set their average charge of assessment at NZ\$2,200 (A\$1,730).

Number of assessments 2001-2007

Year	No. government funded APL undertaken	Total "unqualified" staff in sector*	APL as a % of "unqualified"	Total staff in sector	APL as a % of total staff
2001*	377	5794	6.5%	9520	4.0%
2002*	377	6069	6.2%	10016	3.8%
2003*	377	6383	5.9%	10703	3.5%
2004*	103	6451	1.6%	11,156	0.9%
2005*	103	6171	1.7%	11,504	0.9%
2006	133	6027	2.2%	12,116	1.1%
2007	96	na	na	na	na

*Min. Edu provided APL data amalgamates years 2001-2003 and 2004-2005. Where this is the case, averages have been given for each year
Workforce data only available up to 2006

Completed assessments

A total of 1566 funded assessments of prior learning took place between 2001 and 2007. This is an average of 224 assessments per year which represented a small percentage of the total number of "unqualified staff" in the sector year on year (see the table above).

The Ministry did not keep data on the years of experience in the sector for each applicant or the final level of credit awarded to candidates. Also missing is the number of people who applied for the APL process through other teacher education providers and paid for it themselves. The Ministry explained that they anticipated the decrease in numbers over the years as "the initial cohort of people applied for APL and upgraded their qualifications in the first few years of the initiative"⁴⁴.

In a study of 10 OECD countries, a range of institutional and policy issues were identified that either inhibited or supported participation in higher education by those who lack traditional entry qualifications ("non-traditional learners"). Having a flexible or open admission for non-traditional learners which included systems of APL was singled out as one of six defined features that were vital for participation in Higher Education by these groups.

*"Mechanisms for the assessment and recognition of prior learning can be instrumental in breaking the monopoly of formal education institutions for the certification of acquired knowledge and learning progress."*⁴⁵

CEO of the Early Childhood Council, Sue Thorne, was critical of the APL systems that were offered and identified it as one of several policies that contributed to "huge pools"⁴⁶ of experienced people leaving the sector.

"Many people felt they were being told how to suck eggs. Ruling out qualifications that were older than 6 years and mandating one year no matter what was a very time based way of assessing

*capabilities. People with over 20 years experience were told that they would have to study for at least one year. It would have been preferable to assess what was missing in terms of learning, and to address those needs through individual or crash courses rather than have everyone, no matter what, be forced in to one years mandatory study."*⁴⁷

The consensus amongst interviewed institutions offering the degree or diploma was that the sheer amount of work needed to provide evidence for credit and the bureaucracy of the assessment process prevented people from participating. Many people suggested that it was actually easier to do the course than it was to prepare documentation for assessment.

Methods of assessment

*"Unfortunately the potential of RPL as a means of advancing educational equity in New Zealand has not been fulfilled in practice. It is difficult to pin down specific reasons for this, although it is suspected that it has much to do with the particular approaches to assessment that have been adopted in practice and with practicalities surrounding the resourcing and administering of RPL."*⁴⁸

Of a range of institutions that were interviewed (universities and polytechnics), most used a combination of portfolio and challenge assessments. Portfolio assessments require a huge amount of work on the part of the applicant, as they are expected to prove their competence matches that of the individual units of each course within the qualification. Where evidence is lacking, competence is tested through challenge assessments that are usually written academic assignments set by the institution, although they can also take the form of tests.

Workplace assessments and attestations are not accepted, so presentation of evidence is usually required to be submitted in a format that the institution decides.

Problems with portfolio

From employer organisations to childcare unions and peak bodies, the response was the same when asked about APL in New Zealand. This is that it took so much time to prepare for the assessment, that it was often easier and less work to do the course than it was to gain credit towards it through APL. The process was seen to discourage students from participating in APL programmes, and was given as the reason why so few people completed an assessment.

For these reasons, some institutions have been piloting other methods of assessments. Two of the institutions interviewed were moving away from their portfolio assessment approach and using innovative interpretations of experience which differ from traditional higher education (academic written) entry tests and assessments.

Pioneering new approaches to assessment: The Professional Conversation

Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) only offer the one course in teaching (Early Childhood Education) which is the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) within the Department of Early Childhood Education.

MIT have been providing government funded APL since 2001 using the portfolio approach. Over the past 3 years they have been doing research on their own processes of RPL assessments, and are currently trialing a Professional Conversation approach which they see as preferable to traditional concepts of assessment.

The use of the Professional Conversation approach at MIT involves one long conversation where the interviewer assesses the applicant on a range of topics, and measures reflection and critical thinking. Trials of this method by the Centre of Assessment for Prior Learning in New Zealand found that:

“Critical reflection plays a major part in the changing of experience into learning and involves consciously thinking about one’s experiences and reassessing one’s beliefs and values... The structured questioning process... is based on a facilitated process, a series of steps, to encourage ‘scaffolding’ and ‘help’ interactions and the metacognitive activities of planning, selecting, connecting, tuning and monitoring”⁴⁸.

Instead of spending huge amounts of time trying to explain their knowledge and experience through written and preparing assignments, students can instead spend that time researching, thinking and preparing for the topics of conversation.

“There is a high level of passion amongst most applicants that does not always come across in written portfolio applications. This whole process is more holistic and supportive, and institutions gain by having direct interactions with the subject. Questions over whether students meet the criteria for credit can be determined on the spot”⁴⁹.

Whilst this approach may lead to a fairer assessment and therefore award of credit for applicants, the nature of the courses offered for teacher registration in NZ do mean that

academic literacy will have to be fostered (and assessed) at some point.

Legislating that all workers must have a teaching qualification has meant that most institutions in NZ have had to adapt to the influx of non-traditional learners and cope with their needs accordingly.

RPL in Queensland

After massive child care sector consultation at the end of the 1990s, the Queensland government introduced two major pieces of legislation mandating minimum qualifications for child care workers for the first time in Australia.

The Child Care Act 2002 and the Child Care Regulation 2003 stipulated that all childcare assistants must have a Certificate III in child care, and also set out qualification classifications for different positions within a child care centre:

Position	Minimum Qualification	Length of completion (FT)
Assistant	Certificate III	1 year
Group Leader	diploma	2 years
Director	Advanced diploma	3 years
Coordinator	diploma	2 years

The regulation included generous transitional provisions in order to aid centres to meet the regulation targets. This included counting as qualified those enrolled in courses and allowing the hiring of unqualified staff under the proviso that they enrol in a course within a specific time frame (three to six months depending on the position). Generous time frames were also granted to workers to complete a qualification. This included allowing double the amount of time it would take to complete the course full time, supposedly to allow workers to balance work and life (and family/caring commitments) with study.⁵⁰

Underpinning these pieces of legislation were training strategies that defined the policy to encourage workers to gain the new qualifications required. Since 2001, three different training policies have been released and implemented in Queensland.

The first training strategy from 2001-04 was funded by the Queensland State Government and the Department of Communities (DOCS – then the Department of Families). The next two plans were funded in a joint initiative with DOCS and the Department of Education Training and the Arts and that training plan was administered through Queensland TAFE.

Between 2001-08, DOCs contributed \$9.47m towards the

strategies that went towards subsidising the costs of training for existing childcare workers. Under these plans a total of 4,274 workers have qualified with the following VET qualifications:⁵¹

- Certificate III - 2889
- diploma - 1369
- Advanced diploma - 16

Unfortunately, none of the training plans are publicly available and so details and proper analysis of the success or failures of these policies is limited.

The 2006-09 services skilling plan covers full costs for those from remote Indigenous communities, and provides “financial assistance” for up to eight modules of a qualification for all other workers. But a 2008 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) report found that “Queensland child care workers gain their qualifications through vocational courses mainly at their own expense”, and it is not clear how much of course costs were covered in previous skilling plans.

Aside from direct subsidisation of course costs, as part of the 2001-04 training strategy, workplace assessments and training tools were also to be provided by RTOs to assist in the recognition of competencies and development of skills.⁵² This recognition of prior learning scheme would have been vital for existing staff to gain credit for their existing skills and knowledge, thereby fast tracking the up-skilling of the sector.

A 2004 paper by the Department of Employment and Training had identified traditional methods of RPL as discouraging potential candidates before the process had even begun, due to the overwhelming amount of evidence and work needed to prove competence. The narrow perception of types of admissible evidence did not support or cater for the wide range of skills and backgrounds of participants, and so effectively discriminated against the very people that RPL could help, as well as defeating the purpose of RPL as a tool for equity.⁵³

In 2004 the Queensland Government offered funding for pilot projects in the VET sector for new methods of RPL to all RTOs. What came out of the pilot projects was a method of assessment called Eeeezzy RPL. This utilised professional conversations in open ended questioning on-site, and observation to develop a picture of skills and knowledge which could be verified with supervisors who knew the candidates work in context and over time.⁵⁴

The Children’s Services Skilling Plan 2006-09 made “limited access” to the Eeeezzy RPL system in areas of chronic skills shortages – namely remote and regional communities.⁵⁵ What this indicates is that traditional methods of assessment, which were found to be inadequate by government, were in place at the start of the sector skilling strategies, and are still the only

option available for the majority of workers.

This is supported by LHMU contact with members, very few of whom participated in an RPL programme. The main reason members gave was that it took just as long or longer to fill out RPL forms and provide evidence, as it would have done to do a certificate course.⁵⁶

However, the LHMU also found that many more members did not actually participate in a government funded VET course as they did not know about the training plan and therefore the availability of the free training provision.⁵⁷ In part this could be explained by the lack of publicly available documentation and detail of the training plans. But it also seems that the confusion spread to employers, who, it was found, were incapable of communicating the plan to their workers as many had never heard of the strategy either.⁵⁸

Certainly it is clear that a conflict of interest between RTOs and TAFE may have arisen that contributed to poor communication. There are many child care licencees in Queensland that also operate RTOs. It would not have been in their interest to inform staff of free training available at TAFE as this would have meant that they lost out on training fees.

Official data also seems to show that while the training plan did deliver qualified people to the sector, it was only enough to keep the level of qualified staff static due to large turnover.

Census data shows that between 1999 and 2004 the number of people working in the long day-care sector in Queensland, without relevant qualifications or experience, fell from 13 per cent to 6 per cent. However, in 2006, this rose again to 13 per cent. The amount of staff with VET childcare qualifications rose from 45 per cent in 1999 to 51.6 per cent, and the number of early childhood teachers rose by 2 per cent.

The turnover rate in Queensland for qualified child care workers is half that of unqualified workers, proving that a professionalisation of the workforce can also help stabilise it. However qualified contact worker turnover rate in 2006 was still quite large at 36 per cent.

A 2003 study on training and employment of child care workers in Queensland asked students to identify what would encourage them to stay in the industry. The most frequently reported motivators were increased wages and better conditions.⁵⁹ A report five years later found that wages were still the main deterrent of attraction and retention of staff in the child care sector in Queensland.

*“Experienced assistants who have completed a Certificate III in Children’s Services can move up into the next band of employment, however their career path is considered unattractive. For example, at the next band of employment at the group leader level, the small rise in the pay rate is not commensurate with the added responsibilities”.*⁶⁰

Costs to the sector

While the costs of supporting national Pathways Scholarships for Diploma holders and introducing a nationally coordinated system of Recognition of Prior Learning would be the main new cost to government stemming from the LHMU's early childhood workforce strategy, LHMU has modeled the additional wage costs to the sector that will result from upskilling, to offer government an approximate indication of the potential financial implications for employer and parents contributions to ECEC costs.

Successful upskilling of unqualified workers in the long day-care and preschool/kindergarten sectors will result in small wage increases for approximately 17,137 workers in long day-care and 7,479 workers in state and community preschools. Wage increases will provide a necessary and fair motivation for low-paid early childhood workers to participate in upskilling strategies. They involve relatively small increases, considering the amount of skills and knowledge early childhood workers will have formalised through an upskilling process, and will not affect costs in the sector until 2013, when the upskilling project nears completion. Nonetheless, government needs to factor in the influence small wage increases across the early childhood workforce could have on service fees, if these increases are not covered by state or commonwealth subsidies.

Appendix 1 shows the approximate costs of wage increases per state and territory for 17,137 workers in long day-care and 7,479 workers in state and community preschools to upskill from unqualified to AQF Certificate III level. Introducing a mandatory minimum qualification for early

childhood education and care workers will cost the sector approximately \$88,629,908 in wages per annum.

From Certificate III to diploma

A comprehensive whole of workforce strategy for the early childhood sector also needs to consider upskilling AQF Certificate III workers in long day-care and preschool/kindergarten settings, to replace the diploma holders upskilled to deliver Australia's universal preschool program.

If government is guided by statewide modelling of teacher supply and demand for universal preschool provision, approximately 2341 Certificate III holders in long day-care and preschool will need to be upskilled to replace the 2341 diploma holders implementing universal preschool programs. This will ensure a long-term, sustainable supply of teachers within the ECEC workforce and contribute to advancing career paths for ECEC workers, in-turn reducing workforce turnover.

While the 2341 diploma places necessary to upskill Certificate III holders to diploma level can be provided through the Commonwealth's existing Skilling Australia initiative, government needs to be aware of the cost-impact to the sector of the modest wage increases payable once the upskilling process has been completed. Appendix 1 shows the approximate costs of wage increases per state and territory for 2341 workers nationally to upskill from an AQF Certificate III to an AQF diploma in Children's Services. The cost nationally would be \$7,952,377 per annum.

Conclusion

This paper has summarised a national workforce strategy for Australia's ECEC sector that will enable government to meet its universal preschool commitment in a way that:

- Takes into account the attendance patterns of four-year-olds across all children's services
- Offers parents the choice of accessing affordable preschool programs in long day-care centres, on what ever day and time they want to access care and education programs to support their work commitments
- Genuinely integrates 'care' and 'education' programs within a variety of children's services settings
- Saves the Commonwealth significant amounts in its universal preschool investment, by saving the sector up to \$94,013,390 million per year in wages costs.
- Creates a genuine skills base for the early childhood workforce and career paths that will contribute to decreases in chronic staff turnover levels
- Increases access to education for non-traditional learners
- Offers low-paid workers the chance to improve their income through training to meet demand for an essential service for the community and the Australian economy.

Factoring in the up to \$94,013,390 million in savings to

government gained by upskilling existing diploma holders to deliver universal preschool programs, the entire suite of roughly-costed training initiatives presented in this paper would cost Commonwealth and State Governments approximately \$103,289,602 million over five years. Theoretically, State and Territory Government subsidy of the wage costs associated with upskilling all unqualified workers and 2341 Certificate III workers, to ensure that the modest wage increased resulting from upskilling do not impact on centre fees, would cost approximately \$96,582,285 per annum.

Considering that the need for an expansion in physical places for children in the year before school will mean that the entire portion of the \$533 million allocated to cover the wage costs associated with full implementation of the program are unlikely to be accessed within the first one to two years of implementation, the LHMU proposes that unspent wage funds from the universal preschool budget be allocated to fund the HECS subsidy and backfill initiatives outlined in this paper.

This transitional approach will create the foundation needed to support career paths in the early childhood sector, meeting the government's universal preschool election commitments and providing the capacity to provide quality

COMPARISON OF ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT RATES IN THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL SECTOR

	New South Wales	South Australia	Western Australia
Qualification/Position			
Teacher Aide Year 1	Teacher Aide \$17.14 per hour = \$33,878 per year	School Services Officer 1 Step 1 \$35,434 = approx X per hour	Education Assistant Level 1.2 \$17.64 per hour = approx. \$34,857
Teacher Aide Year 3	Teachers in Training \$39,185	School Services Officer 1 Step 3 \$38,370 = approx X per hour	Education Assistant Level 2.1 \$19.15 per hour = approx. \$37,840
2 Year Trained Teacher	2 Year Trained Teacher \$42,711 per year = approx. \$21.61 per hour	Special Authority \$44,980 = approx X per hour	Untrained Teachers Increment 1.1 \$38,674
3 Year Trained Teacher	3 Year Trained Teacher \$45,558 per year = approx \$23.06 per hour	Band 1 Teachers Step 1 \$51,590 = approx X per hour	Teachers Increment 1.6 \$50,604
4 Year Trained Teacher	4 Year Trained Teacher \$50,522 per year = approx \$25.57 per hour	Band 1 Teachers Step 2 \$54,252 = approx X per hour	Teachers Increment 1.7 \$55,215

care and education for children, families and the Australian economy in the long term.

Once transitional upskilling of the early childhood workforce is complete, government can consider transferring sector funding to subsidise pay parity for early childhood teachers, and wage increases for VET-trained early childhood professionals, addressing the primary remaining cause of high workforce turnover in the ECEC sector.

Appendix 1

The following tables provide a useful comparison of the qualification pre-requisites and corresponding wage rates for teaching staff in the Government School sector and the private Long Day Care sector.

Methodology

The sample agreements selected for the comparison of enterprise agreement wage rates in the Government School sector are an illustrative example of government school teaching rates and classifications. The sample agreements were selected on the basis that they were a representative range of States. New South Wales has traditionally been towards the higher end of pay scales, South Australia has traditionally been the median of all states, whereas Western Australia has traditionally been towards the lower end of pay scales.

The sample agreements selected for the comparison of enterprise agreement wage rates in the private Long Day Care sector are an illustrative example of wage rates in the sector. The sample agreements were selected because the LHMU has had a long involvement in the industry, including a cooperative relationship with teachers' unions to develop career structures.

Legend

New South Wales = Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award 2006 and Crown Employees (School Administrative and Support Staff) Award

Western Australian = 'The School Education Act Employees' (Teachers and Administrators) General Agreement 2006 and Education Assistants' (Government) General Agreement 2007
South Australia = South Australian Education Staff (Government Preschools, Schools and TAFE) Enterprise Agreement 2006

Notes

1. As the South Australian Education Staff (Government Preschools, Schools and TAFE) Enterprise Agreement 2006 nominally expired in March 2008, rates are only current as at the 2007 increase. These rates have been increased by 4% to provide for a more accurate representation of current rates. The rates have been 'rounded up' to the nearest dollar amount. This Agreement does not differentiate between Two-Year Trained, Three-year Trained and Four-year Trained Teachers. The classifications provide for a 'special authority' teacher being a teacher who is not yet registered, Band 1 Teachers Steps 1 and 2 which have been determined to be equivalent to Two, Three and Four-year Trained Teachers respectively.
2. The Western Australian estimates are based on the in-principle agreement wage increases in the proposed The School Education Act Employees' (Teachers and Administrators) General Agreement 2011. The in-principle agreement provides for a 4.5% increase in 2008. The in-principle agreement does not expressly differentiate

COMPARISON OF CURRENT ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT RATES IN THE PRIVATE LONG DAY CARE SECTOR

	Western Australia	Queensland
Qualification/Position		
Child Care Worker	Child Care Giver Step I = \$15.34 + 2% = \$15.65 per hour = approx. \$30,918 per year	Assistant Child Care Worker (Unqualified) = \$14.65 per hour + 2% = \$14.94 per hour = approx. \$29,521 per year
Child Care Worker (Certificate III)	Child Care Giver (Cert III) Step I = \$16.78 + 2% = \$17.12 per hour = approx. \$33,820 per year	Assistant Child Care Worker (qualified) = \$16.78 + 2% per hour = \$17.12 = approx. \$33,820 per year
Child Care Worker (diploma)	Child Care Giver (diploma) Step I = \$18.98 + 2% = \$19.36 per hour = approx. \$38,255 per year	Assistant Child Care Worker (qualified) Year 3 = \$17.95 + 2% = \$18.31 per hour = approx. \$36,179 per year

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON OF WAGE RATES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE LONG DAY CARE

	New South Wales	South Australia	Western Australia		Western Australia	Queensland
Qualification/ Position				Qualification/ Position		
Teacher Aide Year 1	Teacher Aide \$17.14 per hour = \$33,878 per year	School Services Officer 1 Step 1 \$35,434 = approx X per hour	Education Assistant Level 1.2 \$17.64 per hour = approx. \$34,857	Child Care Worker	Child Care Giver Step I = \$15.34 + 2% = \$15.65 per hour = approx. \$30,918 per year	Assistant Child Care Worker (Unqualified) = \$14.65 per hour + 2% = \$14.94 per hour = approx. \$29,521 per year
Teacher Aide Year 3	Teachers in Training \$39,185	School Services Officer 1 Step 3 \$38,370 = approx X per hour	Education Assistant Level 2.1 \$19.15 per hour = approx. \$37,840	Child Care Worker (Certificate III)	Child Care Giver (Cert III) Step I = \$16.78 + 2% = \$17.12 per hour = approx. \$33,820 per year	Assistant Child Care Worker (qualified) = \$16.78 + 2% per hour = \$17.12 = approx. \$33,820 per year
2 Year Trained Teacher	2 Year Trained Teacher \$42,711 per year = approx. \$21.61 per hour	Special Authority \$44,980 = approx X per hour	Untrained Teachers Increment 1.1 \$38,674	Child Care Worker (diploma)	Child Care Giver (diploma) Step I = \$18.98 + 2% = \$19.36 per hour = approx. \$38,255 per year	Assistant Child Care Worker (qualified) Year 3 = \$17.95 + 2% = \$18.31 per hour = approx. \$36,179 per year
3 Year Trained Teacher	3 Year Trained Teacher \$45,558 per year = approx. \$23.06 per hour	Band 1 Teachers Step 1 \$51,590 = approx X per hour	Teachers Increment 1.6 \$50,604	3 Year Trained Teacher	Pre-School Teacher Level 7.1 = \$19.18 + 2% = \$19.56 per hour = approx. \$38,658 per year	3 Year Trained Teacher Band 1 Step 1 = \$18.05 + 2% = \$18.41 per hour = approx. \$36,380 per year
4 Year Trained Teacher	4 Year Trained Teacher \$50,522 per year = approx. \$25.57 per hour	Band 1 Teachers Step 2 \$54,252 = approx X per hour	Teachers Increment 1.7 \$55,215	4 Year Trained Teacher	Pre-School Teacher Level 7.3 = \$20.58 + 2% = \$20.99 per hour = approx. \$41,479 per year	4 Year Trained Teacher Band 2 Step 1 = \$19.57 + 2% = \$19.96 per hour = approx. \$39,444 per year

between Two, Three and Four-year Trained Teachers. The classifications provide for Untrained Teachers and Teachers Steps 1.6 and 1.7 which have been determined to be equivalent to Two, Three and Four-year Trained Teachers respectively. The rates do not include the \$1,600 graduate allowance which is applicable to Steps 1.6 and 1.7.

3. As the Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and

Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award 2006 does not provide for an entry level unqualified Teacher Aide the rate is taken from the Crown Employees (School Administrative and Support Staff) Award. The version used did not include State Wage Case increases after 2004. The hourly rate of \$14.90 from that version was converted to a weekly amount to which \$85.30 was added to provide

for a 2008 rate. The amount of \$85.30 is the sum of the relevant State Wage Case increases from 2005 to date.

4. The Education Assistants' (Government) General Agreement 2007 only provided for an hourly rate. In order to provide for an approximation of an annual salary, the following equation was used: hourly rate x 38 x 52 = annual salary.
5. In relation to Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award 2006 and Crown Employees (School Administrative and Support Staff) Award, both are awards and not enterprise agreements. There is currently no enterprise agreement/s covering Teachers and Teachers' Aides in government schools in New South Wales.

Queensland = A.B.C Developmental Learning Centres Brisbane Central (Qld) Pty Ltd LHMU Agreement 2007-2008 with reference to the Child Care Industry Award – State 2003 (QLD)
Western Australia = A.B.C Developmental Learning Centres Perth Airport (WA) Pty Ltd LHMU Agreement 2007-2008 with reference to the Child Care (Long Day Care) WA Award 2005

Notes

1. In Queensland, all enterprise agreements with A.B.C Developmental Learning Centres are identical in wages and conditions. The wage rates provided for in the agreements stipulate that the rates are the appropriate award rate with a 2% addition.
2. The Child Care Industry Award – State 2003 (QLD) does not provide for a classification of Assistant Child Care Worker 2 Year Qualified being equivalent to a diploma. To provide for an indication of wage rates for a diploma holder, the Year 3 qualified rate was adopted.
3. Where only an hourly rate was provided in an agreement or award, an annual salary approximation was calculated using the following formula: hourly rate * 38 * 52 = annual salary.

UPSKILLING COST MODELLING

Unqualified to Certificate III

COST 1 = Difference between the average of the Western Australian and Queensland unqualified child care worker salary and the average of the Western Australian and Queensland Certificate III level child care worker salary multiplied by the number of child care workers requiring such upskilling (includes Long Day Care, State and Community Preschools)

$$\begin{aligned} \text{i.e. } & \$30,918 + \$29,521 / 2 = \$30,219.50 \\ & \$33,820 \\ & \$33,820 - \$30,219.50 = \$3,600.50 \\ & \$3,600.50 \times 24,616 \text{ (number of unqualified child care workers)} = \$88,629,908 \text{ (COST 1)} \end{aligned}$$

Certificate III to diploma

COST 2 = Difference between the average of the Western Australian and Queensland Certificate III level child care worker salary and the average of the Western Australian and Queensland diploma level child care worker, multiplied by the number of child care workers requiring such upskilling (includes Long Day Care, State and Community Pre-Schools).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{i.e. } & \$33,820 \\ & \$38,255 + \$36,179 = \$37,217 \\ & \$37,217 - \$33,820 = \$3,397 \\ & \$3,397 \times 2341 \text{ (number of certificate III level child care workers to replace upskilled diploma holders)} = \\ & \$7,952,377 \text{ (COST 2)} \end{aligned}$$

Diploma to three-year degree

COST 3 = Difference between the average of the Western Australian and Queensland diploma level child care worker salary and the average of the Western Australian and Queensland 4 Year Trained Teacher rates multiplied by the number of child care workers requiring such upskilling (includes Long Day Care, State and Community Pre-Schools).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{i.e. } & \$38,658 + \$36,380 / 2 = \$37,519 \\ & \$38,255 + \$36,179 = \$37,217 \\ & \$37,519 - \$37,217 = \$302 \\ & \$302 \times 2341, \text{ (number of diploma level child care workers upskilling to 3 Year Degree)} = \$706,982 \\ & \text{(COST 3)} \end{aligned}$$

Diploma to four-year degree

COST (B) = Difference between the average of the Western Australian and Queensland diploma level child care worker salary and the average of the Western Australian and Queensland 4 Year Trained Teacher rates multiplied by the number of child care workers requiring such upskilling (includes Long Day Care, State and Community Pre-Schools).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{i.e. } & \$41,479 + \$39,444 / 2 = \$40,461.50 \\ & \$38,255 + \$36,179 = \$37,217 \\ & \$40,461.50 - \$37,217 = \$3,244.50 \\ & \$3,244.50 \times 2341 \text{ (number of diploma level child care workers upskilling to 4 Year Degree)} = \$7,595,375 \\ & \text{(COST B)} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{TOTAL COST} &= \text{COST 1} + \text{COST 2} + \text{COST 3} = \\ & \$88,629,908 + \$7,952,377 + \$706,982 = \$97,289,267. \end{aligned}$$

Table ES.1 Summary of the position prior to 2010

State or Territory	Minimum age	Age in the year before Year 1	Compulsory age	Nomenclature year before school	Nomenclature year before Year 1
NSW	4.5	Turn 5 by 31 July	Year in which children turn 6	Pre-school	Kindergarten
QLD	4.6	Turn 5 by 30 June	Year in which children turn 6.64	Kindergarten/Preschool	Preparatory
VIC	4.8	Turn 5 by 30 April	Year in which children turn 6	Kindergarten	Preparatory
WA	4.6	Turn 5 by 30 June	Year in which children turn 6.6	Kindergarten	Pre-Primary
SA	4.5	Continuous entry in the term after 5th birthday	Year in which children turn 6	Kindergarten	Reception
TAS	5.0	Turn 5 by 1 January	Year after turning 5	Kindergarten	Preparatory
ACT	4.8	Turn 5 by 30 April	Year in which children turn 6	Pre-school	Kindergarten
NT	4.6	Turn 5 by 30 June	Year in which children turn 6	Pre-school	Transition

Appendix 2

School Starting Age

Source: *Final Report: Cost/Benefit Analysis Relating to the Implementation of a Common School Starting Age and Associated Nomenclature by 1 January 2010*,

Volume 1. Report prepared for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. March 2006.

Appendix 3

ABS Population Projections 3222.0 - Population Projections, Australia, 2004 to 2101

NSW	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	86240	87011
Jun-2005	82521	86342
Jun-2006	83607	82715
Jun-2007	84787	83831
Jun-2008	88619	85025
Jun-2009	89877	88809
Jun-2010	90563	90063
Jun-2011	91287	90744
Jun-2012	92008	91468
Jun-2013	92743	92184
Jun-2014	93489	92918
Jun-2015	94263	93660
Jun-2016	95064	94431
Jun-2017	95892	95229
Jun-2018	96764	96056
Jun-2019	97661	96926
Jun-2020	98584	97838

QLD	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	51992	51830
Jun-2005	50385	53057
Jun-2006	50370	51417
Jun-2007	52266	51521
Jun-2008	54049	53438
Jun-2009	55365	55250
Jun-2010	56347	56570
Jun-2011	57361	57555
Jun-2012	58398	58571
Jun-2013	59437	59612
Jun-2014	59977	60654
Jun-2015	61563	61708
Jun-2016	62659	62786
Jun-2017	63768	63886
Jun-2018	64899	65002
Jun-2019	66061	66137
Jun-2020	67235	67305

VIC	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	60696	62254
Jun-2005	61014	61121
Jun-2006	61105	61360
Jun-2007	62486	61388
Jun-2008	63187	62776
Jun-2009	63978	63494
Jun-2010	64359	64285
Jun-2011	64713	64666
Jun-2012	65097	65021
Jun-2013	65510	65406
Jun-2014	65946	65820
Jun-2015	66412	66257
Jun-2016	66912	66724
Jun-2017	67462	67225
Jun-2018	68047	67772
Jun-2019	68657	68357
Jun-2020	69281	68967

SA	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	17947	18358
Jun-2005	17768	18012
Jun-2006	17465	17819
Jun-2007	17369	17525
Jun-2008	17531	17437
Jun-2009	17612	17603
Jun-2010	17583	17683
Jun-2011	17573	17656
Jun-2012	17580	17646
Jun-2013	17594	17653
Jun-2014	17619	17668
Jun-2015	17646	17692
Jun-2016	17687	17718
Jun-2017	17737	17758
Jun-2018	17800	17807
Jun-2019	17872	17869
Jun-2020	17946	17940

WA	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	25329	26001
Jun-2005	24661	25740
Jun-2006	24726	25101
Jun-2007	25549	25184
Jun-2008	26444	26018
Jun-2009	27031	26956
Jun-2010	27412	27502
Jun-2011	27807	27886
Jun-2012	28203	28279
Jun-2013	28613	28676
Jun-2014	29036	29086
Jun-2015	29457	29509
Jun-2016	29894	29932
Jun-2017	30345	30368
Jun-2018	30798	30820
Jun-2019	31262	31273
Jun-2020	31728	31737

NT	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	3411	3307
Jun-2005	3502	3403
Jun-2006	3653	3497
Jun-2007	3586	3642
Jun-2008	3758	3586
Jun-2009	3826	3757
Jun-2010	3902	3827
Jun-2011	3975	3902
Jun-2012	4052	3976
Jun-2013	4139	4054
Jun-2014	4227	4140
Jun-2015	4314	4228
Jun-2016	4400	4315
Jun-2017	4495	4402
Jun-2018	4590	4496
Jun-2019	4687	4592
Jun-2020	4788	4689

TAS	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	6316	6213
Jun-2005	6058	6348
Jun-2006	5952	6081
Jun-2007	5898	5973
Jun-2008	6167	5923
Jun-2009	6241	6190
Jun-2010	6269	6264
Jun-2011	6301	6290
Jun-2012	6340	6321
Jun-2013	6383	6361
Jun-2014	6426	6402
Jun-2015	6475	6445
Jun-2016	6522	6494
Jun-2017	6573	6539
Jun-2018	6626	6589
Jun-2019	6673	6641
Jun-2020	6722	6688

ACT	Total 3-yr-olds	Total 4-yr-olds
Jun-2004	4024	4119
Jun-2005	3925	4049
Jun-2006	4010	3962
Jun-2007	4191	4057
Jun-2008	4344	4233
Jun-2009	4414	4385
Jun-2010	4451	4456
Jun-2011	4498	4495
Jun-2012	4549	4541
Jun-2013	4597	4591
Jun-2014	4648	4640
Jun-2015	4698	4692
Jun-2016	4748	4742
Jun-2017	4799	4794
Jun-2018	4849	4844
Jun-2019	4905	4895
Jun-2020	4957	4951

Appendix 4

ECEC teacher commencements and completions 2001-06

Year	ECEC enrolments	Change	Percentage change			
2001	2952					
2002	3079	127	4.30%			
2003	2793	-286	-9.20%			
2004	2915	122	4.3			
2005	3055	140	5.10%			
2006	3202	147	4.80%			
ECEC percentage change 2001 – 2006		8.4% increase in enrolments compared with 2001.				
Completions percentage change 2001 - 2006		339 additional completions; A 20% increase in graduates compared with 2001, following a 6% improvement In drop-out rates.				
Year	Enrolments	Completions	Difference	Drop-outs %		
2001	2952	1623	1329	45%		
2002	3079	1753	1362	44%	33%	
2003	2793	1990	803	28.7%		Drop-out rate
2004	2915	1833	1082	37%		45%
2005	3055	2044	1011	33%		44%
2006	3202	1962	1240	38.70%		28.70%

Factoring graduate numbers into teacher supply and demand modelling

There is no need to factor in additional teacher numbers in workforce growth projections unless graduate history shows significant changes or trends that are likely to impact on teacher supply in the near future, rather than continuation of an established pattern of teacher supply, which is already reflected in the existing ratio of teachers in the ECEC workforce.

To determine this, we need to lay graduate history alongside teacher ratio history for the same period. This will not be possible using the National Workforce Survey, which started in 2006. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) Census of Children's Services will be used for workforce numbers and teacher numbers in Long Day Care (LDC). The National Children's Services Workforce Survey will be used for workforce numbers and teacher numbers in LDC for 2006, when no DEST census was conducted.

The table shows that while teacher ratios have decreased steadily, teacher numbers remained fairly stable until 2006. This suggests that teacher ratios dropped because the workforce expanded, at least until 2006.

Between 2001 and 2006, ECEC enrolments increased slightly (about 5% per year) and ECEC completion rates increased slightly (They oscillate between a 14% improvement in 2002 and a 10% drop in 2003. There is about a 6% positive

Year	Long day-care workforce	Percentage of workers with a degree	Number of workers with a degree
1997	36,800	24%	8,832
1999	40,100	22%	8,822
2002	48,012	18%	8,642
2004	52,105	16%	8,337
2006	55,594	10%	5,559

difference between 2001 and 2006 rates). LDC teacher ratios decrease steadily. Teacher numbers decrease slightly, and then more substantially between 2005 and 2006.

ECEC graduate enrolment and completion numbers do not show a strong enough change year to year to conclude that they will have a significant impact on LDC teacher ratios. If anything, a slight increase in ECEC graduate numbers has occurred alongside a decrease in LDC/ECEC teacher numbers. Therefore, it is unnecessary to factor an increase in ECEC graduate numbers into teacher supply/demand modelling.

Appendix 5

Formal articulation arrangements between VET and universities for early childhood training in Australia

Institution	course	3 year (0-5)	4 year (0-5)	3 year (ECEC & primary)	4 year (ECEC & primary)	Distance ed/ online learning?
Australian Catholic University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary)				No mention of credit.	
Central Queensland University	Bachelor of Learning Management (Early Childhood)				1 year credit	"Those students who are currently employed in an early childhood setting are eligible to apply for the internal program and complete their studies online while they continue employment."
Charles Darwin University	Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (Pre-service)				Credit may be granted	yes
Charles Sturt University	Bachelor Education (Early Childhood and Primary)				"No special arrangements apply" for credit/ advanced standing	
Charles Sturt University	Bachelor of Education (Birth to 5 Years)		diploma or equivalent is prerequisite, giving 2 years' credit for a 4-year course equivalent.			Can be done in 4 years part time externally
Curtin University	Early Childhood Education (BEEd)				no credit mentioned	no
Deakin University	Bachelor of Early Childhood Education		diploma or equivalent is prerequisite, giving 2 years' credit for a 4-year course equivalent.			Available on-campus in Melbourne area, or as a series of 'intensives' (approx. 2 days every 6 weeks) at Geelong Campus at Waurn Ponds & at Warrnambool Campus.
Edith Cowan University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Studies)				no mention of advanced standing	no
Flinders University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) /Bachelor of Arts				credit to be assessed individually	no
James Cook University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)				no mention of advanced standing	yes

Institution	course	3 year (0-5)	4 year (0-5)	3 year (ECEC & primary)	4 year (ECEC & primary)	Distance ed/ online learning?
Macquarie University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education)				"If you have previous tertiary qualifications in infants, primary, secondary or adult teaching or a TAFE diploma/Associate diploma you will be given credit for previous studies."	This course is available by distance education study for specific applicants only.
Monash University	Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies				diploma or equivalent gives 1 year credit for this course, which is equivalent to the 4-year Bachelor of Early Childhood Education	Yes. 3 years full time, 6 years part time.
Queensland University of Technology	Bachelor of Early Childhood	1.5 years credit for diploma or equivalent & work experience				Available only as part-time external study over 3 years.
Queensland University of Technology	Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies	1 year credit				no
Queensland University of Technology	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)				1 year credit	
Queensland University of Technology	Bachelor of Education (Preservice Early Childhood)				1.5 years credit for diploma or equivalent & work experience	Available only as part-time external study over 5 years.
Southern Cross University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)				Yes, on an individual basis.	Yes. There are two compulsory week-long summer schools
University of Ballarat	Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)	diploma or equivalent is required for entry, gives 1 year credit. Course is 3 years part-time.				
University of Canberra	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) (0-8 years)				Academic credit of 24 credit points (1 year) given for the Canberra Institute of Technology diploma of	Children's Services; unclear if this applies for diplomas from elsewhere.
University of New England	Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)		4 years part time external; diploma or equivalent & work experience are prerequisites			Only offered as 4 years part-time external University of Newcastle

Institution	course	3 year (0-5)	4 year (0-5)	3 year (ECEC & primary)	4 year (ECEC & primary)	Distance ed/ online learning?
University of Newcastle	Bachelor of Early Childhood Teaching (Ourimbah Campus)	Credit transfer under negotiation				
University of Newcastle	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) (Ourimbah Campus)				Credit transfer under negotiation	
University of Newcastle	Bachelor of Teaching/ Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Callaghan Campus)				1 year's credit	
University of South Australia	Bachelor of Early Childhood Education				1 year's credit	External program is available only to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander applicants living near rural university study centres (Ceduna, Mt Gambier, Murray Bridge, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln, Whyalla) or applicants who have completed the diploma of Children's Services (Child Care) or equivalent.
University of Southern Queensland	Bachelor of Early Childhood	Credit may be granted				yes
University of Southern Queensland	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)				1 year's credit for diploma, 1.5 years for Advanced diploma	yes
University of Tasmania	Bachelor of Education and Care (Early years)	1 year credit				many units
University of Western Sydney	Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Child and Family)	1.5 years credit.				
University of Wollongong	B Education: The Early Years		Credit may be granted.			
Victoria University	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood/ Primary)				1 year credit	

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Index

Forward	3
An endorsement from Early Childhood Australia	5
Introduction.....	7
Executive Summary.....	9
Budget Points	9
A summary of ECA and LHMU proposals	10
Childcare attendance patterns of four-year-olds	12
Parent employment and patchwork care	14
Supply and demand modeling: from diploma to degree	16
Three or four-year trained teachers	21
A comparative wages bill	22
Barriers to training for early childhood workers: time and money.....	23
A Commonwealth ECEC Pathways Scholarship.....	25
Articulation between VET and the Higher Education sector	26
Teacher Registration	27
A whole of workforce strategy	28
Sustainable supply: Skilling Australia	29
A national system of RPL for ECEC workers	30
A national training board for ECEC workers	34
Upskilling case studies: New Zealand and Queensland	35
Costs to the sector.....	39
Conclusion.....	40
Appendices	
Appendix 1	
Qualification pre-requisites and corresponding wage rates for teaching staff in the Government School sector and the private Long Day Care sector.....	41
Appendix 2	
School Starting Ages	44
Appendix 3	
ABS Population Projections for three and four-year-olds.....	45
Appendix 4	
ECEC teacher commencements and completions 2001-06	47
Appendix 5	
Formal articulation arrangements between VET and universities for early childhood training in Australia	48



Securing the best start for children

Early childhood professionals' recommendations for high quality education and care standards; including introduction of mandatory minimum qualifications for the ECEC sector, evidence-based staff ratios and group sizes and programming time for early childhood professionals.



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The childcare union

Contents

Foreword	3
A summary of LHMU recommendations	4
Introduction	7
Rights of the child	8
Outcomes for children	9
Workforce is the glue	10
The content of regulations	11
The structure of regulations	13
Monitoring quality standards	15
Appendix 1	16
Appendix 2	19



Authorised by Louise Tarrant LHMU National Secretary
Level 9 – 187 Thomas St Haymarket, NSW Australia



Foreword

I defy anyone to argue against the need for quality early childhood education and care services. The question is how do we make them a reality? How do we move beyond the rhetoric toward real sectoral change and realised outcomes for children?

Firstly we need to make sweeping changes to the recognition of existing skills and development of new skills amongst the early childhood workforce. There are many terrific and passionate people working in this sector and we are excited that this reform period provides an opportunity for recognition of the valuable work already undertaken in the sector. But we also see the opportunity to create a meaningful career path beginning with the introduction of mandatory qualifications for entry level workers through to 4 year teacher qualified positions. Upskilling is key to building a capable and stable workforce. That’s the glue that will make this quality reform strategy stick.

But even the best early childhood professionals will struggle if we don’t address child-to-staff ratios and group size. Personalised education and development work will never be a priority focus for overworked staff expected to manage unrealistic numbers of children. We know that some of the most valuable learning comes through the personal relationship and interaction of the carer with each individual child. Ratios and group size are a ‘must fix’.

The Federal Government’s consultations around these quality questions is a wonderful opportunity for us to build the quality framework to take this sector forward and ultimately deliver for children and their families, workers in the sector and our community overall.

So we want to thank the government for urging us all to think more boldly and hope that as a sector we take courage from this leadership to make the real change that is so overdue.

LOUISE TARRANT
National Secretary
LHMU – The childcare union
www.lhmu.org.au
www.bigsteps.org.au

A summary of LHMU recommendations

Recommendation 1. The LHMU submits that a clear discussion of the values that underpin Australia’s ECEC system, with reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, be the core starting-point of the Commonwealth’s ECEC quality review and any future reform of Australia’s ECEC system.

Recommendation 2. The LHMU submits that government establishes a group of experts, lead by Early Childhood Australia and including experienced early childhood professionals, to investigate the efficacy of building a strengths based child outcomes framework. This spells out the clearly observable categories of child learning and development which can be used as a basis for interpreting child observations into future planning.

Recommendation 3. The LHMU submits that Commonwealth and States Governments should fund an early childhood career path built on a national classification structure commencing at an AQF Certificate III in Children’s Services mandatory minimum qualification and stepping up to a four-year university trained ECEC professional. State and Commonwealth training structures should support early childhood professionals to articulate between these classification levels through Commonwealth ECEC Pathways scholarships which offer staff HECS subsidies and release-time for study. Free VET training for childcare workers should continue and be bolstered by a National System of Recognition of Prior Learning for early childhood workers.

Recommendation 4. LHMU childcare professionals submit that new quality standards should enforce the evidence-based minimum ratios and maximum group sizes developed by Early Childhood Australia.

(b) Maximum group sizes	
Under twos	No more than 9 children.
Two to threes	No more than 15 children.
Three to five	No more than 24 children.

Recommendation 5. LHMU childcare professionals submit that national quality standards allocate four hours of non-child contact programming time per week to childcare professionals responsible for leading development programs with children.

Recommendation 6. LHMU childcare professionals submit that the following minimum standards be included in new national quality standards.

(a) Rest periods: tea and bathroom breaks
At the very minimum, regulations should require two ten to fifteen minute tea breaks for all staff members. This will reduce staff stress levels, which has been shown to reduce children’s stress levels and increase children’s well-being. Offering care and education workers similar conditions to those enjoyed by workers in most industries will also contribute to reducing chronic levels of turnover in the childcare sector.

(b) Inductions for new early childhood workers
National standards should include a requirement for State and Territory led inductions for new early childhood workers. Formal inductions would:

- Inform child care professionals about their obligations under Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting regimes in each state and territory
- Introduce child care professionals to the role and content of national quality standards
- Inform early childhood professionals of their industrial rights and protections
- Inform early childhood workers of career and training opportunities in the early childhood sector, ensuring

(a) Maximum ratios	
Under twos	1:3
Two to threes	1:5
Three to five	1:8

workers are aware of RPL and training opportunities and so contributing to professionalisation and reduced turnover in the early childhood workforce.

(c) Cleaning standards
National standards should stipulate that early childhood workers are not responsible for cleaning tasks in centres beyond spot-cleaning related to care activities. Professional cleaners should be employed to ensure adequate OH&S standards in children’s services settings.

(d) Cooking staff
National standards should stipulate that centres must employ a cook with relevant qualifications in nutrition and food handling if meals are prepared for children on a regular basis.

(e) Staff rooms
National standards should stipulate that early learning centres contain a separate area for staff respite that is a safe distance from children’s play and education areas.

(f) Roster display
National standards should stipulate that early learning centres display a notice stating the number of staff on duty each day, their positions and qualifications. Rosters should be displayed in an area that is clearly accessible to parents.

(g) Public notice of licence acquisition
Within a mixed ECEC economy which allows for corporate provision of ECEC services, it can be difficult to determine immediately who is responsible for running an ECEC service. National quality standards to require any individual or business applying for a child care license should place an advertisement in the State or Territory’s main newspaper, as required by licensing regulations in NSW, WA, NT and the ACT. Details in the advertisement should include the applicant’s name, or the name of the head of a company making a corporate application and the proposed address for the new centre. These details should also be filed in a publically available spreadsheet on the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care website.

Recommendation 7. LHMU proposes that a distinction between the functioning of ‘licensing’ and ‘accreditation’ continues within a new national quality framework. Licensing should regulate the minimum structural inputs a centre needs before it can open. This should include minimum mandatory staff qualifications, minimum ratios and maximum group sizes. Accreditation agencies should mentor every early learning centre on continuous quality

improvement above and beyond basic quality and towards evidence-based best-practise.

Recommendation 8. LHMU proposes that the States and Territories and the Commonwealth first work together to streamline their approach to quality and ensure that the roles of minimum licensing regulations and quality accreditation for continuous improvement are clear and well-defined.

Recommendation 9. The LHMU proposes that centres must meet minimum licensing standards, which should require all centres to have the minimum requirements for quality care and education, before they open. These minimum requirements should include the ‘iron triangle’ of evidence-based minimum staff qualifications, minimum staff ratios and maximum group sizes outlined in Recommendation 6. Two additional quality standards, ‘Good’ and ‘Excellent’ should then be awarded by Commonwealth Accreditation agencies working with all centres in continuous improvement.

Recommendation 10. The LHMU proposes that even this less ambitious plan for centre accreditation will fail without an information campaign for parents on the characteristics of quality education and care and a Commonwealth review of funding for ECEC services.



Introduction

The LHMU submission to the Commonwealth reform plan for a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia is based on three key sources of expertise:

- **Consultations with early childhood professionals**

The LHMU represents more than 95,000 early childhood professionals in long day care, family day care, out-of-school hours care and preschools around the country. Through the LHMU's BIG STEPS in childcare campaign, these professionals are acting together to reform Australia's ECEC system to provide the best quality education and care for children, families and childcare professionals.

Around the country, experienced LHMU members have formed BIG STEPS in childcare policy groups to consult on the Government's discussion paper and 1500 LHMU members have written testimonials of support for improvements to quality standards in the sector.

- **Alliances with Australia's leading ECEC professional groups**

Early Childhood Australia, Australia's leading advocate for social justice, equity and quality in the education and care of children from birth to eight is the principle partner in the BIG STEPS in childcare campaign. The LHMU is also working in coalition with National Association of Community-Based Children's Services (NACBCS), the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council and Sydney University's Workplace Research Centre on best-practise models of ECEC delivery.

- **Consultations with early childhood development experts**

The LHMU-sponsored Children's Services Policy Taskforce is comprised of Australia's leading ECEC academics, who advise the LHMU on how the BIG STEPS in childcare campaign can ensure the best outcomes for children. A summary of academic research underpinning the quality proposals contained in this submission can be found in Appendix B.

"I love working with children and helping them develop in the early stages of life.

I'd like to see a reduction in the amount of paperwork and cleaning we do. Then we could spend more time addressing the individual needs of the kids. We definitely need reforms to our pay. There's not enough recognition for increased training, skills and responsibility."

KATE MC MILLAN
Experienced childcare worker

Rights of the child

The Commonwealth’s discussion paper on ECEC quality reform makes reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Australia in 1990, but not until Chapter Eleven of the review document and only in specific relation to the values which should underpin curriculum, or the Early Years Learning Framework.

The rights and best-interests of young children should be front and foremost of what Australia sets out to achieve in the functioning of its entire ECEC system and in reform of ECEC quality assurance frameworks. While ‘Human Capital’ considerations are part of the benefits delivered by an accessible, affordable, high quality ECEC system, they should not be the primary motivator of ECEC reform. The rights of dependant children which

our community has an obligation to advance, should be at the centre of Australian ECEC policy.

Recommendation 1. The LHMU submits that a clear discussion of the values that underpin Australia’s ECEC system, with reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, be the core starting-point of the Commonwealth’s ECEC quality review and any future reform of Australia’s ECEC system.



Outcomes for children

The Commonwealth’s discussion paper includes general discussion of the outcomes for children sought through the provision of high quality ECEC. LHMU submits that these general guidelines on outcomes for children be developed into more detailed, specific outcomes for children for inclusion in the Early Years Learning Framework.

As a sector, we will struggle to genuinely measure the quality of education and care offered to children without the guidance of clearly articulated outcomes education and care services are intended to deliver for children. The five general outcomes for children listed on Page 38 of the discussion paper are a starting point, but need to be developed to spell-out the specific and observable development outcomes every child will display at some point in their growth, including in the area of early logic.

Clear identification of these early learning goals will also help parents partner with early childhood professionals in understanding their child’s growth and development.

Recommendation 2. The LHMU submits that government establishes a group of experts, lead by Early Childhood Australia and including experienced early childhood professionals, to investigate the efficacy of building a strengths based child outcomes framework. This spells out the clearly observable categories of child learning and development which can be used as a basis for interpreting child observations into future planning.



"I work in the babies room and I love it. I have a very supportive boss who gives me time off when I need to study. I've almost finished my Diploma. I really like the idea of having teachers in centres full-time because that way you'd get constant mentoring and encouragement."

WASIMA RASOOL
Childcare worker upgrading from Certificate III to Diploma

Workforce is the glue

The Commonwealth’s discussion paper acknowledges early childhood development research which has established the ‘iron triangle’ of quality education and care, (p.14), which includes staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios and group sizes. Regardless of this, workforce issues do not have the primacy in the paper that they will need to if quality reform is to succeed. Workforce is given a one and a-half page consideration in Chapter Eight of the discussion paper.

Without workforce reform to address what the Commonwealth has acknowledged as the ‘iron triangle’ of quality care and education, Australia’s efforts to reform its ECEC system will fail. Nor can a quality ECEC system continue to be built off the backs of under-paid, under-recognised childcare professionals. This is simply unsustainable.

An Executive Summary of LHMU’s proposal for a National Early Childhood Workforce Strategy is contained in Appendix A. This strategy will be presented to the Prime Minister’s Office, the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office and the Office of the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Care throughout September 2008.

The three guarantees of a professional early childhood workforces’ ability to provide high-quality education and care to young children are:

- 1) **Mandatory minimum qualifications and career paths**
- 2) **Evidence-based staff-to-child ratios**
- 3) **Programming time**

Recommendation 3. The LHMU submits that Commonwealth and States Government’s should fund an early childhood career path built on a national classification structure commencing at an AQF Certificate III in Children’s Services mandatory minimum qualification and stepping up to a four-year university trained ECEC professional. State and Commonwealth training structures should support early childhood professionals to articulate between these classification levels through Commonwealth ECEC Pathways scholarships which offer staff HECS subsidies and release-time for study. Free VET training for childcare workers should continue and be bolstered by a National System of Recognition of Prior Learning for early childhood workers.

Recommendation 4. LHMU childcare professionals submit that new quality standards should enforce the evidence-based minimum ratios and maximum group sizes developed by Early Childhood Australia.

(a) Maximum ratios	
Under twos	1:3
Two to threes	1:5
Three to five	1:8

(b) Maximum group sizes	
Under twos	No more than 9 children.
Two to threes	No more than 15 children.
Three to five	No more than 24 children.

Recommendation 5. LHMU childcare professionals submit that national quality standards allocate four hours of non-child contact programming time per week to childcare professionals responsible for leading development programs with children.

Content of regulations

A number of quality issues beyond the ‘iron triangle’ of qualifications, ratios and group size discussed above are not addressed in the Government’s quality review discussion paper, including training on mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and bathroom breaks for staff.

A summary of LHMU’s proposals on the minimum content of national quality regulations is outlined below.

Recommendation 6. LHMU childcare professionals submit that the following minimum standards be included in new national quality standards.

(a) Rest periods: tea and bathroom breaks
Because care and education staff work with dependent minors, they don’t have the same ability as other workers to access tea and toilet breaks. In centres that don’t provide tea breaks, staff can work for up to five hours without a break. For example, a childcare worker commencing work at 7am can be responsible for a room of children until 12:30pm; they will only have access to a bathroom break if they can ensure that another staff member is free to cover their care obligations.

At the very minimum, regulations should require two ten to fifteen minute tea breaks for all staff members. This will reduce stress levels in staff, which has been shown to reduce children’s stress levels and increase children’s well-being. Offering care and education workers similar conditions to those enjoyed by workers in most industries will also contribute to reducing chronic levels of turnover in the childcare sector.

To enable workers fair access to tea and toilet breaks without compromising the safety or quality of care offered children, the Federal Government should conduct a modelling exercise to determine the best approach to rostering and relief staff provision to cover staff breaks in all rooms.

(b) Inductions for new early childhood workers
National standards should include a requirement for State and Territory led inductions for new early childhood workers. Formal inductions would:

- Inform child care professionals about their obligations under Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting regimes in each state and territory
- Introduce childcare professionals to the role and content of national quality standards

- Inform early childhood professionals of their industrial rights and protections
- Inform early childhood workers of career and training opportunities in the early childhood sector, ensuring workers are aware of RPL and training opportunities and so contributing to professionalisation and reduced turnover in the early childhood workforce.

(c) Cleaning standards
National standards should stipulate that early childhood workers are not responsible for cleaning tasks in centres beyond spot-cleaning related to care activities. Professional cleaners should be employed to ensure adequate OH&S standards in children’s services settings.

(d) Cooking staff
National standards should stipulate that centres must employ a cook with relevant qualifications in nutrition and food handling if meals are prepared for children on a regular basis.

(e) Staff rooms
National standards should stipulate that early learning centres contain a separate area for staff respite that is a safe distance from children’s play and education areas.

(f) Roster display
National standards should stipulate that early learning centres display a notice stating the number of staff on duty each day, their positions and qualifications. Rosters should be displayed in an area that is clearly accessible to parents.

(g) Public notice of licence acquisition
Within a mixed ECEC economy which allows for corporate provision of ECEC services, it can be difficult to determine immediately who is responsible for running an ECEC service. National quality standards must stipulate that any individual or business applying for a child care license should place an advertisement in the State or Territory’s main newspaper, as required by licensing regulations in NSW, WA, NT and the ACT. Details in the advertisement should include the applicant’s name, or the name of the head of a company making a corporate application and the proposed address for the new centre. These details should also be filed in a publically available spreadsheet on the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care website.



The structure of regulations

As is demonstrated in Recommendation 6, quality regulations for early learning centres need to take into account a broad range of factors, from cooking, cleaning and centre layout, to the quality of nuanced interactions between early childhood professionals and individual children and observations of child outcomes like early logic application.

LHMU would argue that the philosophy underpinning the initial separation between licensing and quality accreditation in children's services in Australia was sound. What created problems was the specific content of both the licensing and accreditation regimes and a failure to effectively monitoring licensing and accreditation standards.

The LHMU supports the continuation of separate ECEC licensing and accreditation bodies, with licensing regulations focused on the minimum structural inputs necessary to achieve a basic level of quality and accreditation focused on mentoring centres through continuous improvement plans.

Licensing regimes need to regulate and monitor the basic structural inputs for quality care and education, including the 'iron triangle' of quality care – minimum staff qualifications, minimum staff ratios and maximum group sizes. Licensing should provide the starting point that all centres need to meet before they are able to open.

Accreditation can then improve upon the structural basics a centre must have in place before it operates. Accreditation

agencies can oversee individual continuous improvement plans for every centre, and mentor centres through the quality improvements which stem from an accumulation of knowledge and experience and an aim for best-practise, the definition of which changes as our knowledge of early childhood development continually improves.

In terms of jurisdiction, LHMU submits that States and Territories and the Commonwealth first work together to streamline their approach to quality and ensure that the roles of minimum licensing regulations and quality accreditation for continuous improvement are clear and well-defined.

Recommendation 7. LHMU proposes that a distinction between the functioning of 'licensing' and 'accreditation' continues within a new national quality framework. Licensing should regulate the minimum structural inputs a centre needs before it can open. This should include minimum mandatory staff qualifications, minimum ratios and maximum group sizes. Accreditation agencies should mentor every early learning centre on continuous quality improvement above and beyond basic quality and towards evidence-based best-practise.

Recommendation 8. LHMU proposes that the States and Territories and the Commonwealth first work together to streamline their approach to quality and ensure that the roles of minimum licensing regulations and quality accreditation for continuous improvement are clear and well-defined.

"I enrolled in an early childhood teaching degree because I wanted to further myself. My own personal development, more than the need to gain recognition, was the main reason. It was the obvious next step for me in providing ECEC.

The course costs between \$1,500 - \$2,000 per semester, which I'm putting on my credit card. Then there's the uni fees and textbooks, which adds about another \$300 a semester. It's really hard financially. It's also hard in terms of time. In long day care you work longer days, and it's hard getting home and opening a text book after a 10 hour day.

I know that if I was training to move to a primary school I would get more money. But working with the 0-5 group is where I want to be. You get to have an impact on the very first years of a person's life."

NATALIE SARAPUK

Long day care centre director ECEC university student



Monitoring quality standards

LHMU supports increased interaction between Government regulators and early learning centres in the form of spot-checks to enforce minimum licensing regulations and collaborative work towards continuous improvement on quality accreditation measures.

But for any ‘ranking’ of early learning centres to genuinely contribute to increased monitoring of quality in the ECEC sector, parents need to be better informed about the characteristics of quality education and care. Australia’s childcare funding system also needs to be reviewed before the introduction of centre rankings, to ensure that all centres are funded sufficiently to provide the staffing arrangements necessary for quality ECEC. A funding review is necessary to ensure that all centres have the appropriate balance of basic parents fees and Commonwealth subsidy to ensure the basic minimum of education and care services that need to be provided for all children. Ideally, a funding review would also better target Commonwealth childcare subsidies, linking funding to essential structural inputs for quality ECEC such as staff ratios and qualifications.

As such, the LHMU proposes a simpler centre accreditation system that requires centres meet licensing standards for a basic minimum level of quality provision before they open and are allowed to operate. Two additional quality standards – ‘Good’ and ‘Excellent’ could then be awarded by Commonwealth Accreditation agencies working

with all centres in continuous improvement. These labels would recognise above-licensing provision of quality inputs such as staff qualifications, above-minimum ratios, extended programming time, in-service training and interaction with parents and the community.

To enable even this approach to centre licensing and accreditation, Government must conduct a quality care and education information campaign for parents, and open a review of ECEC funding arrangements.

Recommendation 9. The LHMU proposes that centres must meet minimum licensing standards, which should require all centres to have the minimum requirements for quality care and education, before they open. These minimum requirements should include the ‘iron triangle’ of evidence-based minimum staff qualifications, minimum staff ratios and maximum group sizes outlined in submission point (6). Two additional quality standards, ‘Good’ and ‘Excellent’ should then be awarded by Commonwealth Accreditation agencies working with all centres in continuous improvement.

Recommendation 10. The LHMU proposes that even this less ambitious plan for centre accreditation will fail without an information campaign for parents on the characteristics of quality education and care and a Commonwealth review of funding for ECEC services.

“Burnout is a major problem in childcare. This is my eighth year and I’ve seen numerous staff leave – brilliant workers, but they were burnt out by what was expected of them in terms of work with children, observations and paperwork. When staff suddenly leave it’s upsetting for children, because children and parents get attached to them.

I’ve stayed in childcare because I get such a buzz from helping young children grow and evolve into confident, extroverted, independent people. I’m really excited to be part of the campaign and it’s great to see the government giving early childhood the attention it deserves. More encouragement and support for childcare workers would really help stop the burnout I see so much of.”

KYLIE SCHNEIDER
Diploma holder

Appendix 1

A universal solution

A National Early Childhood Workforce Strategy to provide 15 hours preschool by 2013; increase women’s workforce participation; address pay parity in a female-dominated workforce; and prevent staff turnover by creating opportunities for professional progression.

Introduction

The Commonwealth Government has committed to providing all children in the year before school 15-hours per week of universal access to early learning programs led by a four-year trained teacher. To support working parents, government has committed to the flexible delivery of these programs in all of the children’s services settings that four-year-olds attend.

Because Australia’s children’s services sector is fragmented, nationally coordinated, cost-effective implementation of this commitment will be a challenge. To assist government in meeting this challenge, LHMU and its principle partner, Early Childhood Australia (ECA), have developed a National Early Childhood Workforce Strategy aimed at meeting the demand for four-year, university-trained early childhood professionals to supply 15 hours universal preschool by 2013.

Executive Summary

An analysis of the attendance patterns of four-year-olds to children’s services makes one thing clear: parents with children in the year before school use a ‘patchwork’ of care and education services to support their work commitments. Forty-two percent of couple families combine traditional preschool programs with another form of formal care, ¹¹ most often in a long day-care setting. The main reason they do this is to support their work commitments: 74 percent of mothers with four-year-olds worked between 16 and 35-plus hours a week in 2005.

A survey of ‘patchwork care’ arrangements in Australia highlights the pressure that segmentation between traditional preschool programs and long day-care services places on working families. Patchwork care arrangements also raise significant challenges for the implementation of the Government’s commitment to provide 15 hours a week of teacher-led preschool, to all children in the year before school. At first glance, the cheapest way to ensure all four-year-olds have access to 15 hours of teacher-led preschool would be to

notch-up hours in traditional preschool programs and ‘parachute in’ teachers for 15 hours in long day-care settings. However, this approach will not help families juggling patchwork care arrangements, or support an increase in womens workforce participation. Nor will it ensure that all four-year-olds receive 15 hours of face-to-face time with an ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) teacher, because all four-year-olds do not attend long day-care services for the same 15-hour block.

If government is committed to providing all four-year-olds with access to a teacher-led program, with a teacher present on-site, differences in four-year old attendance patterns leave little alternative but to support a full-time teacher requirement in long day-care settings catering for children in the year before school.

The LHMU proposes that the most reliable, sustainable and cost-effective way of providing full-time teachers in long day-care settings is to upskill existing childcare workers to deliver universal preschool programs across the long day, five days per week. LHMU’s upskilling proposal will:

- Guarantee that all four-year-olds have access to at least 15 hours of ECEC teacher-led preschool program, regardless of the day of the week they attend long day-care or community kindergarten;
- Offer working parents the choice of accessing a preschool program on whatever day and time-slot they need to support their work commitments, thus supporting increased workforce participation and COAG’s ‘Human Capital’ agenda;
- Ensure that the goal of 15-hours universal preschool is not derailed by teacher shortages or an unwillingness to work in the long day-care or community kindergarten sector;
- Ensure that preschool teachers are ECEC specialists, promoting quality care and education for young children and prevent the need for bridging courses (for primary-trained teachers who may be willing to work in early years settings);
- Support the genuine integration of education and care programs for the early years;
- Offer government a relative cost-saving on wages, by funding the difference between existing diploma-level worker

wages and teacher wages, rather than subsidising an entire teacher wage for 15 hours or more;

- Create a career path for the early childhood workforce, which currently experiences huge levels of turnover due to low wages and limited opportunities for professional progression;
- Contribute to addressing pay equity concerns for the female dominated, low-paid early childhood workforce;
- Offer low-paid workers an opportunity to improve their income through training and career progression.

A summary of LHMU proposals

Early Childhood Professional Pathways Scholarship
The upskilling of diploma holders already working full-time in early childhood centres will save the Commonwealth significant amounts in annual wage payments, offering up to \$106,462,835 in annual savings. This is because upskilling current diploma holders to teacher level means government need only subsidise the wage difference between current diploma-level and teacher wages, rather than a full teacher wage for between 15 and 40 hours per week.

National LHMU modeling indicates that the early childhood sector will require at least 2651 additional ECEC teachers by the year 2013, to provide universal preschool for all children in the year before school. LHMU propose that the Commonwealth works with states and territories to develop a national Early Childhood Professional Pathways Scholarship for Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Diploma holders in long day-care and community kindergarten settings to upgrade their qualification to degree level.

Because early childhood workers fit the profile of ‘non-traditional learners’, LHMU proposes that these scholarships be used to address the financial and time barriers that so often prevent low-paid, female childcare workers with family responsibilities from accessing training opportunities. Modeled on Victoria’s “Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships for Pathway Students Scheme”, national Early Childhood Professional Pathways Scholarships should include:

- An extension of the 50 percent HECS subsidy (currently offered to students committed to working in rural areas) to low-paid childcare workers. Offering this subsidy to diploma holders targeted to upgrade their qualifications to a three-year degree (to meet universal preschool teacher requirements) would cost government approximately \$3,260,730 per year over five years.

- Backfill payments to centres to allow pathways students one day off per week, to complete their studies and the practicum component of their degree. Backfill payments for pathways students would cost the Commonwealth approximately \$78,925,572 over four years.

To prevent skills shortages from disrupting backfill, LHMU propose that, as a transitional measure, centres supporting pathway students be granted a one-day-per-week exemption from regulations governing qualified staff ratios in the three-to-five years room. Improvements to retention, resulting from the LHMU strategy to create career paths in children’s services, will create sufficient improvements in turnover to retain the staff needed to provide backfill nationally.

A review of articulation between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) in the early childhood training sector indicates that there is the potential for articulation to run smoothly for a Commonwealth Pathways Scholarship pilot program. Beyond a pilot program there are reforms that would be necessary to support a roll-out of articulation options to larger numbers of early childhood workers. These include the creation of formal, national articulation agreements by industry, placing onus on HE providers to offer articulation arrangements to diploma students, academic literacy support for pathways students, and review of practicum requirements for workers already delivering programs full-time in centres.

Teacher Registration
In terms of registration for ECEC teachers, which currently is not provided by state and territory teacher registration boards, LHMU proposes that registration for all early childhood workers be offered through an early childhood specific professional association. This could involve Early Childhood Australia, the peak professional body for early childhood workers, offering formal registration for ECEC professionals, accrediting ECEC course content and supporting early childhood career paths by coordinating articulation between VET and HE.

A whole of workforce strategy
While Commonwealth ECEC Pathways Scholarships will ensure sufficient ECEC teacher supply to implement government’s universal preschool commitment by 2013, for this commitment to be sustainable, a whole of workforce strategy is needed. The introduction of national mandatory minimum qualifications in Australian ECEC will be a crucial step in creating a genuine career path in children’s services, and the ‘iron triangle’ of inputs required to guarantee quality education and care for families.

Skilling Australia

At first, providing formal qualifications for the approximately 17,137 workers in long day-care and 7,479 workers in state and community preschools without early childhood qualifications appears daunting. Yet through government's existing Skilling Australia initiative, low, to no-cost training places can be extended to unqualified childcare workers without the need to create additional budget items for training places. The only additional budget item necessary will be funding for the introduction of a nationally coordinated system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the early childhood workforce. This will ensure that the extension of Skilling Australia places to existing workers goes smoothly.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Following extensive consultations with training experts to seek innovative solutions for extending Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to low-paid workers, the LHMU proposes the creation of a national ECEC training body responsible for coordinating RPL within the early childhood workforce. Potentially linked to a national professional registration body

for Australia's early childhood workforce, this training body would engage key training stakeholders in a nationally coordinated system of RPL which promotes recognition of competencies through a 'professional conversations' approach and on-the-job observation.

Finally, a comprehensive whole of workforce strategy for the early childhood sector needs to consider upskilling AQF Certificate III workers in long day-care and preschool/kindergarten settings, to replace the diploma holders upskilled to deliver Australia's universal preschool program.

Wage costs of upskilling

Clearly there will be costs associated with the introduction of a National RPL system and upskilling of the early childhood workforce. There is however significant sums allocated for training for the sector and cost offsets will exist in the upskilling process. LHMU will provide the Federal Government a more detailed costing of the workforce development strategy.



“The biggest concern of staff in my centre is ratios. Current ratios make it difficult, if not impossible, to provide developmental opportunities for children. I work in the babies’ room, where I have to juggle five babies’ physical needs, such as feeding and nappy changes, with a one-on-one focus on children’s developmental needs. A lack of relief staff also means we rarely get programming time to work on proper development programs for children.”

CHRISTIE GOSS

Diploma-qualified Long Day Care Centre worker

Appendix 2

Quality ECEC for children: A Summary of Australian and International Research

Some 1.5 million children attend children's services in Australia. That means children's services have a crucial role to play in upholding our community's commitment to the rights of children in Australia.

There is clear agreement in local and international ECEC research about what children need to grow and learn. Secure attachments and developmentally-attuned interactions with primary carers consistently emerge as the foundation of quality ECEC.

There are three main predictors of a childcare professional's ability to interact with children in a formal care setting: the amount of time a primary carer has to develop individual relationships with each child, the stability of those relationships over time and the qualifications that inform carers' understanding of early childhood development and learning. ECEC programs with high numbers of qualified staff, low staff turnover and high ratios of staff to children, consistently deliver improved cognitive and socio-behavioural outcomes for children.

Staff to child ratios and group sizes are important for basic health and safety. When there are high numbers of care and education professionals to children, staff are able to more effectively monitor and promote healthy practises which reduces the transmission of disease. Better ratios are also associated with fewer situations involving potential danger and abuse.

Beyond this, staff ratios and group sizes are the crucial determinant of staff's ability to engage with children in individually and developmentally responsive ways. They enable children with more complex needs to benefit from greater adult attention.

Childcare professionals working within professionally recommended staff to child ratios tend to be more sensitive, less harsh and less detached. On the other hand, adults with responsibility for too many children spend a higher percentage of time on simply controlling them.

Australia currently has different ECEC quality regulations in every state and territory. Despite the fact that ECEC research consistently shows staff-child ratios and childcare workers' qualifications are the most important indicators of quality care, Australia's staff ratios are worse than international best-practice.

Nor does Australia have a national mandatory minimum qualification for childcare workers. Thirty to forty-five percent of the ECEC workforce have no formal qualifications. Queensland is the only state with a compulsory entry-level qualification, where childcare workers need an AQF Certificate III in Children's Services to work in the sector. In New South Wales centres with twenty-nine places or more are required to hire a teacher.

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Early Years Learning Framework

Securing the best start for children

December 2008



The childcare union



Foreword

LHMU Submission to COAG Consultations for National Quality Reform – Early Years Learning Framework

Caring relationships are the foundation to learning. How these relationships are planned for, resourced and built upon in childcare centres gives staff, parents and children a secure footing. From this base children develop and learn as individuals and alongside their peers.

When parents and childcare staff work together as children's first educators, children develop an enjoyment and excitement for learning to take with them to school and into their future lives. As early educators staff require a professional support framework to capture and guide everyone's efforts.

Only when there is sound professional preparation, planning, thoughtful reflection and careful assessment do children, staff and parents learn together well. This professional education and development work will necessarily rest on other critical reform in the sector. These reforms include proper remuneration, minimum standards (such as evidence-based ratios and group sizes), qualifications of staff and guaranteed regular and well-resourced programming time.

The LHMU – The childcare union is pleased to present our recommendations for a strong Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Childcare union professionals have been meeting in every state with the Federal Government to make submissions to the proposed Framework to ensure quality appropriate reforms.

These recommendations are based on our National Quality Reform submission *Securing the Best Start for Children* and can be read as an addendum to that document.

We look forward to seeing the Early Years Learning Framework being strengthened by the early childhood workforce and in turn become the 'glue' which delivers strong outcomes for children, families and workers.

Louise Tarrant
National Secretary
LHMU – The childcare union
www.lhmu.org.au
www.bigsteps.org.au

December 2008

Introduction

The LHMU has previously submitted 10 Recommendations to the Australian Government in the *Securing the Best Start for Children* document.

These recommendations for the Council of Australian Government (COAG) reform process spell out the union's proposal under the Australian Government's National Quality Framework. The recommendations state the need for: underpinning values; collaboration with expert professional advice and leadership; improved minimum standards, including ratios, for children and working conditions for staff; and better information for families.

As part of the National Quality Framework, the Australian Government's draft Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) puts forward proposals for the more detailed programming and planning aspects of professional work with young children. The LHMU proposes that this Framework provide guidance for all staff and to some extent parents and children on a shared vision, approach to teaching and evaluation of children's learning in early childhood settings.

In particular, this document must guide both qualified and qualifying professionals working to educate children in the early childhood sector. Recognising the contribution of the first Australian peoples, parents as their child's first teachers and early childhood settings as communities of learners are concepts bound together strongly by the overarching terms Belonging, Being and Becoming. These themes form a catch-phrase that resonates for those who value learning underpinned by an ethic of care.

The union has participated strongly across the nation in the Government's consultations with stakeholders.

The LHMU submits the following extension of *Securing the Best Start for Children* recommendations to the draft Early Years Learning Framework.



BIG STEPS in CHILDCARE

A PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING

LHMU's Submission to COAG's DRAFT Early Years Learning Framework

Rationale:

The LHMU's Big Steps in Childcare campaign is working with all stakeholders to achieve improved outcomes in early childhood settings.

The union's plan is to upskill the current committed workforce through the recognition and assessment of existing and new early childhood education skills. A professional framework for learning will underpin partnerships between parents, staff and other professionals. A collaborative effort to secure supported learning environments for young children will complement, extend and strengthen current practice and achieve long awaited reform.

Recommendation 1:

The values expressed through the Framework's motifs of Belonging, Being and Becoming and its democratic guiding principles reflect the union's submission for *children's rights to remain as a core reference point for any reform*. Integral to any meaningful reform are Australia's Aboriginal ancestry and Aboriginal cultures' present and future influence on early childhood service provision.

The LHMU submits that the intentional inclusion of people's diverse cultural perspectives and healing of their experiences of exclusion will build stronger mainstream services. These reciprocal cultural relationships must be more clearly endorsed. Aboriginal histories, beliefs, knowledge and practices can combine to inform European and younger Australian cultures in a shared learning framework.

A more explicit commitment to dismantling exclusion, as

expressed by Dr Karin Martin in the support document, would better address the Government's agreed outcome for the early years reform agenda that states *children will benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children*.

Recommendation 2:

The Framework's description of Learning and Pedagogies reflects the LHMU's submission for the recognition of specialised knowledge required to attain a *strengths-based child outcomes framework*.

The LHMU submits that a professional approach to the Framework's call to feature play, relationships, creativity, environments and transitions can only be achieved through time and resource-rich support of a collegial commitment to professionalism in early childhood teams. Every staff member must be a part of a 'community of learners' that fosters a conducive environment for a child to learn within. Intentional and systemic support of up-skilling staff teams through professional development opportunities are described in the union's career path recommendations. The acknowledged specialised skills for working with young children can be built upon a valuing of existing employees' relationships and experiential knowledge of children and families. This will ensure the curriculum Framework works effectively and gains solid community recognition through demonstration of evidence-based outcomes.

The LHMU proposes that a supplementary handbook to the Framework provide practical programming examples such as those represented in the working party's research document (June 2008).



Recommendation 3:

The Framework describes three important aspects of pedagogical leadership: shared assessment; research; and reflective practice. These are proposed to inform future planning for children, bring about change and continuous improvement, and foster a culture of critical reflection in the work of early childhood educators.

The LHMU proposes this can only be achieved in universally accessible Early Childhood Education and Care settings following the implementation of the union's recommendations for:

- An early childhood career path built upon a national training, recognition of prior learning and classification structure
- Scholarships
- HECS subsidies
- Release time for study

This interlocking career path support will ensure that pedagogical leadership can be aspired to by all team members who bring a diversity of recognisable and assessable background experience and cultural knowledge to working with children in the birth to school age range.

The LHMU proposes that the draft statement on pedagogical leadership be extended to include qualified *and qualifying* educators. This recognises the importance of practicum experience in any pedagogical role and the reality of the sector's current endeavours to up-skill.

Recommendation 4:

The LHMU concurs with the Framework's identification of key learning outcomes expressed through four broad curriculum areas:

1. Identity and Belonging
2. Language Literacies and Creative Expression
3. Exploration, Investigation and Thinking
4. Civic Participation and Contribution to the Future.

These areas reflect a holistic approach to pedagogy that moves forward from the more narrow milestone-focused developmentalism of checklists. The LHMU commends the Framework's forward thinking and ambitious vision for children to be regarded as competent co-constructors of knowledge who contribute to and have agency through civic participation.

The LHMU submits that *non-child contact programming time* needs to be structured into the professional work role of educator teams to allow for the many activities of pedagogy and educational work proposed in the Framework. These include: articulation of professional practice; mediating partnerships between stakeholders; working in strategic alliances; and practising reflective and critical inquiry projects.

These important aspects of a qualifying and qualified educator's roles require time and structural resourcing. They also require personal commitment by staff to their own professional development and learning in order to reach the Framework's aspirational goals.

References and Notes:

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'Quality programming at our centres takes a lot of forethought and careful planning. As the team Director I believe all staff should have regular input into the programmes and I work hard to make sure that junior as well as senior staff have input away from their direct work with children. I try to balance the continuity for the children with familiar replacement staff as well as opportunities for everyone to contribute to the learning project!'

'Our parents really value the individual portfolios we prepare for children which are often taken with them when they move on to school. We have even received letters of thanks from extended family members overseas. A curriculum document needs to stress the importance of programming opportunities for all staff and the strength it brings to child, staff and family relationships.'

Wendy McDuff, Director,
Acton Early Childhood Centre, ACT.





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