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Submission to Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee

30/04/03

The Secretariat

In Summary.

Terms of Reference.

Areas of skills and labour shortage ... this could be relieved by introducing through TAFE more pertinent short courses as a progression to a degree. There are many courses that could be introduced at night school level as stepping stones to a career in children's education and care.

Effectiveness ... At present is hampered by differing and confining state regulations concerning staffing.

Effectiveness of industry strategies ... There are many training providers all offering good experiences for workers in care, but this provision is hampered by elitist lobbying to restrict recognition of qualifications to degrees gained in tertiary colleges.

Performance of job network Regionally, not able to comment personally but colleagues appear to have the same problems gaining tertiary qualified staff.

Strategies The use of TAFE, night school, correspondence, private colleges and tertiary courses at a part time incremental level would be advantageous.

Consultations with industry ... This is sadly lacking at present and needs to be resolved, in future consultation should be with users and providers.

A comment on union participation ... The union participation appears to be weighted towards protecting the rights of tertiary graduates alone, and geared to ensuring a closed shop for these people, there are many very skilled unqualified workers, TAFE graduates, ex - nurses etc. in centres.

Perhaps the membership of unions would increase if they looked to all of the workers in care.

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As a private centre operator I have a vested interest in the effectiveness of the current Federal Government, State and tertiary provision of avenues for obtaining qualifications and training for workers in children's services. It is difficult for me to disassociate myself from this 'interest' when discussing parameters for the industry, therefore I would like it noted that these are my own concerns that I wish to add to your list of submitters.

1. Concerns re training of adults globally

There is sense in examining the training with a view to providing workers in child care with the appropriate skill for their position. However it is imperative that any changing of systems does not induce higher cost for users without true assessment of the need for change through consultation with providers and users.

Generally I would like to see the education of adults caring for small children widened to include educating students, male and female, in the study of human development --- skills for understanding children's development at junior / high school, before they ever reach the stage of adulthood, so that if or when they produce children they will have a clear understanding of children's needs and their own obligations as carers.

2. Current Training.

There are many training providers all offering good experiences for workers in care.

The regulated expectations of training are at present singularly unhelpful, these regulations ensure that equal work does not attract equal pay, a considerable disincentive to working in this field, regulations and expectations of regulators contribute considerably to burn out and constant changing of staff.

We are employing trained people in our centres in greater numbers than ever before, inservice options proliferate, so let us ensure that any training attends to the needs of the children in our care, their parents, staff working on the floor and centre management, rather than the needs of the training suppliers and the unrealistic idealism of the regulators.

The child care industry has been regulated to employ tertiary trained teachers in centres in NSW enrolling more than 29 children, who then do exactly the same work that TAFE graduates do with the aforesaid 29 at a higher cost to the industry with no added value to the children in care or their client / parents.

This regulation was introduced after intense lobbying by tertiary institutions to provide a guaranteed workplace for their graduates.

The Early Childhood Tertiary graduates generally opt for the more attractive positions as teachers in the public and private junior and primary school system, leaving child care centre management in day care centres unable to recruit the tertiary qualified person required by regulation.

This regulation should be changed to include rather than exclude qualifications other than tertiary training.

The present practice shows that the TAFE and graduates from other institutions do equal work for less cost to the clients. It would be more practical to allow other possibly TAFE or private college graduates to fill the role that is already vacated in practice by the tertiary trained graduates, thus ensuring centres have an ongoing pool of creditable workers in the centres.

Ideally, training courses should be accessible to trainees at venues easily reached, at flexible hours, possibly combining attendance and correspondence for ease of access.

For too long tertiary hierarchy in children's services have had the power to protect their own positions at the expense of the industry.

Specific future skills needs.

Funding for inservice options should be removed from politically oriented community based organisations.

TAFE, tertiary colleges and the private sector should be given the responsibility for providing appropriately diversified and recognised short courses, introducing greater flexibility and providing opportunities for bridging courses at convenient hours, late evening or weekends.

Opportunity should be made for TAFE Associate Diplomas to convert to further qualifications after a competency assessment in regard to recognition given to prior learning, experience, and inservice previously attended - for instance, mature age with more than x amount of years experience could drop the extraneous personal development aspects of tertiary training, recognising that they have reached a level of maturity higher than that of school leavers.

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Credit should be given to trainees for any specific skills achieved and work done in the wider field of education such as art, community service, language etc. More adults would be attracted to updating their skills if they had the option to do so in short blocks of six monthly intervals with credits given for previous work and completed blocks.

All courses should be attuned to the training needs of, and in consultation with the workplace providers and employees.

College and TAFE hierarchy must consult with industry representatives, employers, parents and employees, so that the boards of the respective training institutions can be attuned to the needs of the child care community and the public generally rather than trying to ensure their own graduates monopolise the field.

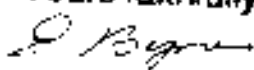
There has been increasing participation from the private sector in providing appropriate courses for the industry. This has been achieved for a reasonable cost to users at little or no cost to the taxpayer. The Federal and State Governments should be endorsing this private sector participation and recognising the skills of their graduates as pertinent to the needs of the industry. Nationally, centres, public or private should abide by the same regulations and employ staff who have taken part in a diversity of training programs that are cost effective and pertinent to the needs of the users.

Presently centres accommodate children with special needs where possible, these children are only able to cope for short blocks of the day, need more specialised input and highly individualised programs.

The present allocation of special needs itinerant workers needs overhauling, it is virtually impossible to obtain the sort of help necessary for these children with the obvious consequence that the centres are reluctant to take on the awesome responsibility for these children's care because of the commitment to the other enrolled children.

It would help alleviate this problem if more itinerant special needs teachers were available at a subsidised cost to centres and their expertise was fairly distributed. I look forward to being informed of the conclusions of this reference committee and am available at a time of your convenience for consultation if required.

Yours faithfully



Eileen Byrnes Director Jolly Frog Kindergarten.