

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

### **Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning**

Melbourne — 18 September 2008

#### Members of the Sub-Committee

Mr M. Dixon

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr N. Kotsiras

Mr P. Hall

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms J. Hope

Research Officer: Ms C. Whiteman

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Ms B. Romeril, executive director, and

Ms R. Williams, Community Child Care Association.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open this hearing of the subcommittee of the Education and Training Committee. As you would be aware, this committee is hearing evidence today in relation to our inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning. I advise those who are speaking to us that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege, if that is required. I would like to welcome all those speaking. Today the first witnesses are representatives of the Community Child Care Association of Victoria. We have Barbara Romeril and Rhiannon Williams. We would be pleased to hear a little bit about your views in regard to teacher professional learning in the child-care and early childhood area and would be happy to ask some questions once you have had your opportunity to give your views.

**Ms ROMERIL** — Thank you. We are really delighted to be here today. We see this inquiry as being yet another piece of evidence that the Victorian government at all sorts of levels is enacting its policy commitment to recognising that the early years are a time when teaching and learning occur and that early childhood services are in fact part of the education system. The fact that the terms of reference for this inquiry allow you to explore issues of professional learning for educators in the early childhood system is very, very welcome.

As our submission sets out, we have a very strong view that the term ‘teacher’ is often applied way too narrowly. It has been used industrially to define a particular group as different from others. While we certainly recognise that tertiary qualifications in a teaching discipline add value to teaching and learning, we firmly believe that every adult who interacts with young children is in fact teaching those children and that children are learning in every environment. So given our brief in representing and providing professional support to child-care services in Victoria, our comments today are in regard to all people who work in the child-care system, whether they have a teaching qualification or another qualification such as a child-care qualification or whether they are in fact unqualified staff — in fact, many of the principles that we apply, apply to families and community members as well. But today we are talking about the people employed in child-care services and referring to all of them as educators.

Our work exposes us to the strengths and the challenges facing that early childhood workforce, and we believe some of the questions that this inquiry is asking are crucial and need to be answered and acted upon. There is not a strong culture of continuous professional learning amongst educators in the early childhood sector. For many people working in that sector, and for many employers employing the educators in that sector, there is a bit of a notion that child care just needs to be good enough and that as long as it is not causing damage to the children, well and good. However, increasingly the scientific research is demonstrating that that is absolutely untrue and that in fact the learning experiences and development opportunities that children face in the first three years of life in particular are crucial to laying down the foundations for their capacity to learn and contribute throughout their lives.

There is now, fortunately, a sea change occurring within the child-care sector and much more of an appreciation that the staff are educators and are required to now become reflective learners within their own workplace and to be continuously upgrading their skills and abilities. So it is absolutely the right time to be asking questions about professional learning for educators in the early childhood service system. But because we are coming from a culture that has not had that tradition, there are some enormous challenges. When you have an opportunity to read our detailed submission you will see that the range of professional learning needs we have identified through our ongoing needs analysis with the child-care sector in Victoria is mind-blowing really — from the very basic material about childhood development and how to run a program that is engaging and good for children, through to relating to families and communities, and understanding the changing environment that children are growing up in and the much more sophisticated notions about the latest theories in child development and ethics in the role of an early childhood professional et cetera. So responding to that broad range of questions, from the very basic ‘How do I do this job when I walk in the door in the morning?’ through to the much bigger questions of ‘Why am I doing this job? What does this mean about me and my role in the world and my impact on these children and then future generations of Australians?’ is a big task.

There is enormous goodwill in the early childhood sector now to grasp the nettle and respond to that big challenge, but there are huge barriers to overcome. It has been a valuable opportunity in answering your questions to identify what the barriers are and what could be done to overcome those barriers. One of the most troubling barriers I believe is this outmoded notion that child care is fundamentally different to teaching and that therefore kindergarten teachers and schoolteachers require a different approach to and a different notion of professional learning than people who just wipe noses and change nappies. All of that interaction with babies is in fact teaching, and those children are learning. We — collectively; society — need to find a way of absolutely putting to bed that misguided notion that people working with very young children are not teaching. Some of that has been internalised by the

workers themselves, so we need to work on their self-awareness and awareness of their own professionalism, but we also need to lift the requirements on those workers to have some formal training and to be involved in ongoing professional learning. That is a huge shift in attitude, thinking and expectation by the workers and by the employers.

In the child-care sector in particular, where two-thirds of providers in Victoria are commercial operators, there is quite a big cultural barrier as well, with the owners of those services often taking the view that their workers are there to work under their instruction and the owner is the person who will have the professional expertise and provide the professional leadership. The research evidence suggests it is the person who is actually interacting with the child who needs the high-level technical skill and engagement with current thinking. To expect that to reside in the owner and that the workers should just do what they are told is absolutely not best practice and is not supported by the evidence. That is another major barrier: how do we bring a sector into this new culture of valuing and investing in the professional learning of the workforce when there is a strong financial and cultural impediment to that within the commercial providers?

We believe the best way to overcome that is by setting a high standard in government regulation — that is, the benchmark below which no operator, commercial or community, can fall. At the moment the children's services regulations are way too modest in that regard. So something which can be done soon, because the regulations are due for renewal in 2009, and which would have an immediate positive impact on enabling the early childhood workforce to engage in professional learning would be to set the benchmark higher in those minimum standards and require all licensed operators, commercial or community, to ensure that every staff member has some background in recognised professional training in their field and to ensure that the entire staff are actively engaged in ongoing professional development and not just the owner or the leader.

There is a whole raft of other impediments, including the low wages that staff are paid and the lack of time release during work time. We are asking very low-paid people to volunteer their time after hours to participate in professional learning, and that is a big ask, especially in a physically demanding job like working with babies and young children. As I mentioned earlier, the diverse range of needs of the sector means the delivery of professional learning needs to be very responsive and delivered in diverse forms and with the content pitched to a range of audiences, because the workforce comes from such a diverse knowledge base. That is a quick sort of overview of our analysis, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Barbara.

**Mr DIXON** — Just to staff start off, I notice you make online learning available. How is that going? Is it popular, is it useful and is the technology not there? Can you just expand on that a little bit, please?

**Ms ROMERIL** — It is going surprisingly well. We started offering that last year, with some trepidation. There is a general belief within the child-care sector that many child-care workers are not confident with technology, that they are on low wages and do not have access to equipment, and that it is an ageing population of workers so they are not necessarily enthusiastic about using technology. But we decided to give it a go, and we have been surprised at how well it has been taken up, not only by young workers in a child-care centre where they do have access to a computer, but by family day carers working at home and outside-school-hours care workers either during their work hours in a school setting or at home. So it has been taken up not just universally but quite strongly by workers in all service types. It is a very clever technology. The training participants are actually interacting in real time, not only with the trainer but with the other participants remotely. There is a real interaction with the group; it is not just one-to-one training, and it is certainly not just a mechanised tick-the-box process. There is real human interaction and therefore the opportunity to delve deeply into the underpinning knowledge of whatever the topic is.

**Mr DIXON** — Do you actually provide that training?

**Ms ROMERIL** — No. We contract an organisation that is expert in the delivery of that.

**Mr DIXON** — Who is that?

**Ms ROMERIL** — I forget their name. It is in the calendar here. We will get that for you.

**The CHAIR** — So are the online courses that you offer similar to 2-hour type courses in terms of the topics they cover but just delivered in a different way?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Now that we are moving into looking at the child-care type area, I have not gained a clear understanding of the training that would be required of staff or the general level of training of staff who are presently operating in child-care facilities.

**Ms ROMERIL** — The Victorian children's services regulations that I referred to earlier set the minimum standards, and in the long-day-care sector services are required to have some staff with a diploma in children's services, and they are considered to be fully qualified child-care professionals; and then they can employ a number of other staff without qualifications or with a certificate which is not a recognised qualification. If they wish to deliver a kindergarten program and receive the state government subsidy for a kindergarten program, they also need to employ a worker with an early childhood teaching degree. The requirements are a little different in family day care and outside-school-hours care.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have a sense of how many people are employed in there? I am not quite sure, I suppose it is the child-care centres, but do some of them offer kindergarten opportunities?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Yes, a large number do.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any idea of the number of people who would be working in that area?

**Ms ROMERIL** — The number of?

**The CHAIR** — Staff.

**Ms ROMERIL** — The number of early childhood teachers working in a long-day-care setting? Is that the question?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Ms ROMERIL** — I do not have that information with me, but I could get it for you.

**The CHAIR** — I guess I was then looking at what is the percentage that presently might be doing some additional training once they are in position. Do you have a sense of how many are taking up those opportunities of extra professional development?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Certainly within the program offered by the Community Child Care Association we are getting quite good penetration. I would not be able to give you a percentage of workers in the workforce that are accessing it, but I could get that information for you. But there is possibly another related question there about the engagement of people within the sector in upgrading their qualifications. You might be aware that the Victorian government is currently offering incentives to people with a diploma in children's services to upgrade to a degree and to then commit to work within a long-day-care setting, because they want to get more kindergarten teachers working in long-day care, so that all four-year-olds, regardless of what kind of service they are attending, have access to a program delivered by an early childhood teacher. There are the beginnings of some engagement there. The response has not been huge, but there is certainly interest within the child-care sector amongst diploma-qualified staff in undertaking degree studies and upgrading their qualifications.

**Mr DIXON** — What sort of professional development is the most called for, do you find, by your members?

**Ms ROMERIL** — As I said in my introductory remarks, the diversity of the sector means the demands are quite diverse.

**Mr DIXON** — Okay.

**Ms ROMERIL** — Probably, though, the one thing we are asked for most consistently is one-to-one onsite professional assistance. I think this is a reflection of the pressure under which child-care services workers within

child-care services are operating. When they are aware there is a gap in their knowledge and skills, either as an individual worker or as a service, the first response is 'Help! I need someone to come and sit beside me and work with me on solving this'. We do not have that capacity, nor do we believe it is necessarily the best form of professional learning to individualise it in that way. So we encourage workers and owners of services to identify local networks where they can meet with other child-care professionals and get mentoring support from their peers, to attend calendared sessions where they can meet with people from a range of services who are grappling with the same issue and benefit from the learning that is shared in that group and to engage in other forms of professional support. But really, if we went by demand, we would be sending trainers out one to one to hold people's hands in the workplace.

**Mr DIXON** — You made an earlier comment that I want to refer you to. My impression of the workforce in your industry was a much younger age profile than, say, the school teaching profession; would that be correct?

**Ms ROMERIL** — I have not done that comparison, but there was a study of the early childhood workforce done by the Victorian government on behalf of all of the states and territories a couple of years back. It revealed that the child-care workforce is ageing along with kindergarten and other childhood service types, so yes, it is an industry where young people can and often do make their first forays into the workforce, but they often do not stay. The people who make a commitment and a career out of working in early childhood are an ageing cohort.

**Mr DIXON** — So you are having the same problems that the teaching force does that they come in for a few years and go off and do something else, or travel?

**Ms ROMERIL** — That is right, and those who stay long enough to develop really deep skills and knowledge and the capacity to share those skills with their peers and provide mentoring support are now reaching retirement age, and the workforce that is coming up behind them has seen a lot of churn and a lot of loss of knowledge and skills and experience.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Barbara, up to what age do you give the evening sessions? Is there a limit to the age?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Sorry, I missed the first part of your question.

**Mr ELASMAR** — The evening session; you have an evening session for which you charge kids \$22.

**The CHAIR** — It is not the kids; it is the teachers.

**Mr ELASMAR** — It is the teachers, is it?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Yes. This is professional development for the early childhood staff.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Fair enough.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of where you offer these evening sessions, as a regionally based MP I am interested to see what sites you might offer outside the Melbourne metro area.

**Ms ROMERIL** — We work very hard to deliver our training and professional support as broadly around the state as possible, and obviously that is much less of a challenge for us than our colleagues in Queensland and Western Australia where it is a massive challenge. It is in fact a requirement of our commonwealth funding in delivering this training that we get a good spread geographically. It is always a challenge, though, because at any regional site we need to attract enough participants to make it useful for that group, and therefore there are some regions where there simply are not enough services on the ground to get a critical mass to offer training, but our online training is another option. The network meetings that we facilitate, which are less formal training but nevertheless highly valuable professional learning for the participants, where they do get to sit around the table and take charge and decide what the topic is and share their knowledge amongst themselves, they happen around the state as well, so there are a number of mechanisms for reaching out.

**The CHAIR** — So presumably you offer courses in the major regionals — Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and a couple in Gippsland?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Do you offer them further out than there?

**Ms ROMERIL** — I believe so. Again, I would need to refer to our calendar, but it does have the locations here — Benalla, Echuca, Shepparton, Sale, Bairnsdale, Inverloch, Morwell, Wonthaggi.

**The CHAIR** — Good.

**Ms ROMERIL** — Plus Geelong and Warrnambool and outer areas of Melbourne as well — Bacchus Marsh, Narre Warren, Frankston, Broadmeadows, Bundoora — so it is a priority to offer the opportunity for child-care professionals to meet together as close to their workplace as possible and to engage in professional learning close to their workplace. I found the information you were asking for earlier. One World for Children is the company that delivers the online training, and they are very good.

**The CHAIR** — So do people who attend your courses gain some sort of certificate to show that they have attended that they can then use in their CV in the future to further opportunities of advancement?

**Ms ROMERIL** — They do and, further to that, where possible, we design our training courses to cover the content of accredited training, so that the workers are then able to use that certificate in getting credits when they are enrolling in a certificate or a diploma course.

**Mr DIXON** — What are your views on moving towards professional development as being linked to salary increments? Is that something that you think is useful, or it is hard for your industry at this stage? What would your views on that be?

**Ms ROMERIL** — I think it would be a very positive development because at the moment there is no financial reward at all for staff who are participating in professional learning. If a staff member gains a diploma, then they become qualified to apply for a more senior position in the service and that brings with it a salary increase, but with any other form of professional learning there is no financial reward at all and, given the appallingly low wages, even a modest improvement in salary in recognition of participation in ongoing professional learning could make a real difference to the motivation of a staff member to participate.

**Mr DIXON** — Does your organisation accredit all the PD that is available or is that someone else's job or you do not know all the providers or how does the accreditation side of things work?

**Ms ROMERIL** — What do you mean by 'accredit'?

**Mr DIXON** — Are there courses that are available for your workers, where you see what is available and you say, 'Yes, this is worthwhile. We as an organisation accredit this course as being something that is worthwhile', or you might look at another one and say, 'This is just a mickey mouse course. We won't encourage that'. Do you have any oversight at all about what is offered?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Only to the extent to which we contract and fund the delivery. It is part of our commonwealth contract that we conduct the needs analysis, develop the plan for responding to those needs and then contract other providers to deliver, and in that process we have a process for assessing the offering and ensuring that what is to be offered is of a reasonable standard and on that basis we enter into a contract to fund that and then there is continuous evaluation to ensure that it maintains that level, but of course there is a whole range of other providers of professional learning in the early childhood sector that we have no relationship with and no capacity to make that assessment.

**The CHAIR** — Are you finding that there are some groups of workers in the child-care area that you are having difficulty reaching and getting involved with? How can that be dealt with?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Obviously there are the issues that I mentioned earlier about services that do not release their staff to participate in professional learning during work hours, so we are reliant on staff volunteering their time after hours. There is an additional barrier for staff working in the large corporate child-care chain, which has its own in-house training facility. That company chooses not to involve its staff in the commonwealth-funded professional learning.

**The CHAIR** — This is ABC?

**Ms ROMERIL** — Yes. When we write to their services to alert them to our offerings, the letter will often come back unopened. As we understand it, the head office in Queensland has a policy of offering both the accredited training and the ongoing professional learning, and they actively discourage their staff. I believe the centres do not have internet access. They have intranet, so they can communicate within the company, but they are not able to access our website, for example, to find out what professional learning is available outside the company. That is a concern because we believe early childhood workers need to have a breadth of perspective to bring in a whole range of knowledge and influences to inform their interaction with children. No one provider can meet that, we believe, which is why we contract a range of providers and encourage workers to engage with a whole range of professional support.

**The CHAIR** — It is very interesting that they operating in such an insular way. Have we got a sense of the in-house training that they do — whether it is very broad or whether you think it is pretty limited?

**Ms ROMERIL** — No, we do not have access to that information.

**The CHAIR** — So you have certainly, in a range of ways, covered what you would like our inquiry to add in. You have talked about registration requirements and other means of encouraging staff to increase their professional learning involvement. You said that you link your courses as much as possible, where there are opportunities, to certified training. Is that opportunity being taken up to a great extent — that staff are in fact upgrading their certification through your courses, either going to diploma or other levels of training?

**Ms ROMERIL** — I do not know the answer to that, but I could certainly find out. The TAFE colleges would be able to tell us whether they are getting people applying for their certificate and diploma courses and using evidence of participation in our programs as part of their recognition of prior learning.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Barbara and Rhiannon, for coming along. It is clearly an interesting area, and we are looking forward to meeting a few other groups in the same area this morning.

**Witnesses withdrew.**





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#### Witness

Ms M. Carter, chief executive officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Meredith. You would be aware in regard to our inquiry into teacher professional learning that we are particularly looking at the early childhood sector today. Having just heard from the Community Child Care Association, it is good to follow on with Kindergarten Parents Victoria, to learn a bit more about what you do, certainly in particular what your observations and advice is in regard to teacher professional learning. I hand over to you, then we will probably have some questions for you.

**Ms CARTER** — Yes, and perhaps feel free to interrupt me if I am really getting off the track that you want to explore.

I have given you an overview there of the vision for the early childhood sector that Kindergarten Parents Victoria has developed, which essentially has six core elements. It speaks about: education for life, rather than just for school — so a holistic preparation for life; universal participation, which we think the research evidence demonstrates is essential to getting the best outcomes for our children; excellence and innovation, which is fairly obvious in terms of its meaning; a cohesive service system, in that we do think there needs to be greater collaboration across the sector to ensure that families can access the services they need to ensure the best outcomes for those families; involved community — I will perhaps explore that a bit more later; ‘involved community’ really does mean serious partnerships with parents, and the OECD, for example, supports the view that parents should be involved in the governance of services, not just in supporting program delivery. That is one of the components that obviously we as a peak body for the community-based sector in the three-to-five-year-old age group supports. Finally, responsive and flexible programs speaks to the need to respond to the changing demographics in the community and changing patterns in terms of workforce participation and so on.

That is a broad overview of the Vision 2011 that KPV has. The organisation exists to promote the voice of parents in early childhood education, and that means more than 200 000 children and families who are served by our members, who comprise over 1200 early education and care providers across the sector. Increasingly — and I guess that is a follow-on of the collaboration that KPV itself encourages — those members include child-care centres as well as kindergartens and various other stakeholders in the sector, such as local governments, and we have amongst our members cluster managers, the group employers of kindergartens, as well as independent kindergartens.

We also have a subscriber base that includes private for-profit child-care centres as well as other community-based organisations such as out-of-school-hours care providers and so on. We are a little bit different to a lot of peak bodies and a little bit similar to community child care in that sense — and a little bit different to them as well. Like them, we provide a lot of other services that many peak bodies do not to the sector. In particular we provide a management and advice service to the communities that run kindergartens, and we also provide a payroll service for kindergartens across the state. It is a little bit, in some senses, like a mini-VECCI for kindergartens.

In terms of current priorities for professional learning, the way we have approached that is to say that the first priority is to encourage higher levels of professional training amongst more of the early childhood workforce to enable them to actually provide high-quality education and care, and that recognises that a critical driver for current reforms at both a state and national level is the aim of both increasing access to kindergarten and integrating early education and care to give children and families greater access to both.

Essentially in one way you could say that kindergarten provides the highest quality child care available in Victoria now, because most of the kindergarten workforce is degree qualified, and overwhelmingly degree-qualified teachers are accepted internationally as a key indicator of quality in early learning. We would particularly refer you — I am sure your staff are already aware of it — to *Starting Strong II*, the OECD review of more than 20 countries, conducted over the last decade, which provides basically a meta-analysis, if you like, of early childhood research and practice.

I guess we would say that degrees are important because a degree should equip staff with a greater understanding of both early childhood development and just as importantly, how to design programs that will respond to the needs of the individual children, appropriate to the individual child’s stage of development. Whilst increasingly there is evidence that children learn from birth, there is data to support the view that for three-to-five-year-olds participation in programs led by degree-qualified teachers really does make a difference, especially for disadvantaged children.

You will hear that over and over from teachers in schools, who will say that they can see the difference between children who have been to kindergarten and those who have not, and the research data longitudinally now in both

the UK and the US supports that view. It also supports the view that the longer the “dose”, if you like, of kindergarten, the better. Children who have had three-year-old kindergarten, even though it may only be 3 to 5 hours a week, will do better than children who have only been to four-year-old kindergarten. For many children, especially disadvantaged children, who might come from a background where going to a service at all is quite a big transition for them, that three-year-old “dose” of kindergarten basically primes them to get the most that they can out of four-year-old kindergarten.

So we would say the immediate priority for professional learning is simply to promote qualifications in the early childhood workforce, especially to address what the Australian Parliamentary Library describes as ‘the problem of program quality in child-care settings’. Whilst not too many four-year-olds are actually in long day care centres that do not have kindergarten programs, there are a number of children who are in that situation, and obviously that is undesirable. Also, as I say, I think that increasingly the data will probably show that having better qualified teachers from birth is highly desirable as well.

A number of factors mean that we are moving towards a shortage of kindergarten teachers, and that will impede access for children to quality learning programs. They include the ageing of the current kindergarten workforce, the current baby boom in Victoria, the desire of parents that their children have access to kindergarten programs for three-year-olds as well as four-year-olds, and of course the commonwealth’s commitment to extend funded kinder for four-year-olds to 15 hours, which is up from the 10 hours currently subsidised by the state.

I think to some extent we are already seeing that teacher shortage in the kindergarten sector as well as in child-care settings. It is becoming difficult to get teachers. In child-care settings that is particularly an issue with the industrial conditions which kindergarten teachers will not work under. What we are seeing, if anything, is kindergarten teachers moving into schools because they are qualified to teach children up to age eight rather than the other way into child-care settings. That is a major challenge in terms of professional learning.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of training more kindergarten teachers, what are the key issues? Do we think there is a lack of young people wanting to go into kinder teaching? Is there a lack of training options? I presume there is also the issue of those who are presently in the system and how you could upgrade their training. We are interested in your thoughts on that.

**Ms CARTER** — Yes. Certainly we are concerned that for young people entering kindergarten is not so attractive where the positions are part time. We have a dilemma in that the older workforce like the part-time positions; the younger workforce do not. Trying to address that is an issue for us. How you maintain both at the same time is problematic, but also making visible to new graduates the extent of professional support and networking available to them in the field now is a challenge for us.

At the end of the submission I have referred to the KPV pilot project that has recently been funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It is a collaboration between Kindergarten Parents Victoria, Monash University’s faculty of education and the Municipal Association of Victoria. We will be piloting it in three local government areas, and part of it is about creating networks of teachers in each of those local government areas so that they will have joint on-the-job professional development opportunities and at the same time opportunities to network with each other. Monash has piloted this already and has found that it is an alternative — and it is a cheaper alternative — to the one-to-one professional supervision that they can otherwise provide for teachers and students, and that the students and teachers learn from each other. People who have been out in the field for quite a long time — and the average teacher would have been in the field for about 11 years — have plenty to learn from new graduates, and similarly the graduates have plenty to learn from experienced teachers.

The networks of teachers from across different kindergartens, and probably different settings as well — we are just about to start, so we will see what settings will actually participate — could include some child-care settings. Both teachers and students will participate. Certainly it is Monash University’s view that that will assist as students are doing their training in showing them that their desire for professional support and collaboration is capable of being achieved in the early childhood sector in the community settings as well as in schools where it is obviously extremely visible to them.

One of the things we think is desirable about that is that it is a challenge where you have close collaboration with schools, and particularly where you have kindergartens on school sites, because generally a school’s understanding

of play-based curriculum, for example, is poorly developed. It can be that the kindergarten program and approach can be swallowed up in that environment. Increasingly schools are learning and applying a play-based approach to structured learning through the early years of school as well, but that is an ongoing issue for us as well.

The issue of collaboration with schools and also across early childhood settings is one that raises the second priority for professional learning that I have referred to in the submission, which is that staff need to be able to work in multidisciplinary settings to support inclusive models of learning for children, and to support cross-disciplinary collaboration. In fact the OECD suggests that we need new types of educators who can work in a multidisciplinary team and who understand the need to be more flexible in the way they deliver services. That speaks to university education and preparation of students as well as, I think, on-the-job professional training. We think both directions should be pursued.

In terms of inclusive models — and I am thinking about both children from different cultural backgrounds but also children with disabilities, for example — it is important that early childhood teachers understand both cultural inclusiveness obviously and how to engage people, but also that they understand the principles of early intervention and some level of what that might involve.

We have a shortage of early intervention staff in the early childhood arena as well, so it is really important that teachers are not just reliant on trying to get specialist staff in. They actually do have to understand how they can support that themselves. I understand that, for example, in New Zealand the basic training of many different early childhood professionals is common. They all learn about early intervention, cultural inclusiveness and all of the rest of it and how to design programs for babies through to eight years old. Then they can branch out and, if you like, specialise after they have done their basic training. That is an interesting model for us to explore in the university sector, and particularly for Australia. I know that RMIT on the disability front is trying to develop or has developed a degree course that combines early intervention and early childhood education to at least some level. That might be worth exploring further with them, or I can get some more information for you about either of those models if you are interested.

A third component of professional learning needs to be enhancing the capacity of the staff to provide parental support and education and to work in real partnerships with parents. The OECD report again identifies positive outcomes for children as flowing from the relationships that the models of service support. So while we are seeing at the moment a very positive focus on the professional training of teachers, we are not seeing so much focus on the need to also support models that will allow strong relationships to be developed at a number of levels such as between the cohort of children that you have — consistency of the cohort of children is very important and they learn from each other — the relationships between the teacher and the students, and the relationship between the parents and teachers. So we need to look for models that will actually foster all of those things.

Obviously there is an understanding that parents need to participate in their children's learning and that if they understand what is going on in the kindergarten and how the things that they are doing in the kindergarten contribute to their child learning, then they can do the same sorts of things at home. That is fairly basic, although not always well understood. It was a bit of a revelation to me when I first started at KPV — a better mother now, I suspect. I think the other issue is simply developing opportunities for parent involvement in the service. Kindergartens have got a long tradition of parent involvement in kindergartens, but it needs to go well beyond the 'You can help cut up the fruit', and particularly for — —

**The CHAIR** — Or be on the committee.

**Ms CARTER** — 'You can be on the committee', and, as I said — I think I put in the reference for you there; I am not sure that I have — certainly in the OECD's report *Starting Strong* they suggest that the involvement in decision making at the level of governance is actually both a kind of entitlement of citizens, if you like, and also contributes to social cohesion. It is, in the view of the OECD, a contributor to good outcomes of the children.

Certainly beyond community-based governance structures I think broader community engagement and outreach strategies in our early learning services are going to be increasingly important to get to the hard-to-reach children. We have got very good participation now. We have got about 94 per cent participation in four-year-old kindergarten, but it is the children that might most benefit that are least likely to come, and partly that is because their parents do not feel confident that the service will actually welcome them. There are some terrific examples of services that do engage families. It takes quite a lot of time, and it does depend on the development of strong

relationships between the service staff and the families. One that I was visiting — I am not sure if it was yesterday or the day before; it has been a busy week — at the Broadmeadows regeneration project there is some fabulous stuff going on, collaborations between schools and community committees - members of KPV, including particularly Broadmeadows Uniting Care. One of the preschools — Meadowbank — has a program, for example, called Pathways for Parents.

That helps address the final issue that I wanted to touch on, which is about reflecting in the workforce the diversity of the community. At Meadowbank they have many — not so much indigenous; though they do have some indigenous — refugee and other CALD families who have very little familiarity with either the concept of kindergarten or the importance of it, and one of the things that they are finding is that the school principals' advocacy of the importance of kindergarten makes a real difference. These parents take notice of school principals where they may not take so much notice if another community leader says that kindergarten is important. The Meadowbank team encourage the parents to volunteer. If they volunteer, I think they get some level of discount on the fees that they pay. So they come, they meet people, they see what their children are doing and they start to become more engaged. If they feel that they are able to help the kindergarten in some way, they will do it. So they will read to the children for example and that fosters the relationships between the children and their parents. As well as an understanding of things that they can do at home, it also gives the parents confidence that they can take a stronger role in their child's early learning, where often they will lack confidence.

It moves parents through to actually undertaking early childhood qualifications. They have had a number of parents actually do certificates and become formal kindergarten assistants. I am not sure if anybody has actually gone on to get a degree yet, but that is an area where we really do need to have people at least getting the certificate III. It gives us both the professional learning of the workforce that we need to concentrate on to reflect diversity of the community, and it also is providing real jobs and real participation of the parents in the services.

Those were the key areas that I wanted to touch on. I have given you quite a lot also by way of an extract from the submission that we made on the Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform, particularly looking at workforce sustainability and growth, talking about opportunities for co-location with schools and how that might also be addressed. There is also a little bit more detail about some of the collaborative professional learning that KPV already offers. One of them is our annual statewide conference, the Early Childhood Education Conference, that we run in collaboration with a range of peak bodies and key organisations in early childhood every year. That generally attracts at least 700-or-more participants over the two days that we hold it. We usually have international speakers talking about things like the research evidence in early childhood, and a number of workshops that enable people to explore issues of inclusion and anything else — training in anaphylaxis and all sorts of things. It particularly partners with the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, and it is a highly regarded professional learning opportunity for the field .

I refer again to the KPV Solutions pilot projects, which I think are essential to promoting, as I said before, both the visibility of existing structures for mentoring and networking and so on for teachers, but also providing actual support in the field, which I think is lacking. You have got staff often in small centres without a lot of support for day-to-day professional supervision and development, and parent committees feeling that they cannot provide adequate support for them, and often cluster managers similarly feeling underresourced to do that. That there need to be more resources in the field would be my final plea in order to support greater professional learning for early childhood staff to deliver the outcomes we want to achieve.

**Mr DIXON** — KPV conducts professional learning. Do you contract out professional learning as well to organisations?

**Ms CARTER** — Most of what we do is actually governance support and advice to services. As I said, we do broad professional learning exercises, like the conference, but otherwise we particularly concentrate on training for committees. Through the KPV Solutions pilot projects we will be working with Monash to deliver specific professional development. That is a collaboration rather than contracting out.

**Mr DIXON** — Yes. I have one other question. Do you have a view on professional learning or the successful completion of professional learning being attached to salary increments for staff?

**Ms CARTER** — Obviously the affordability of early childhood education is a big issue for us because parents pay a large chunk of the cost in the kindergarten sector, and most of our parents are not eligible for the

approved child-care benefit from the commonwealth — the approved child-care benefit or the child-care tax rebate — an issue that I think is actually a barrier to greater collaboration and greater integration of early childhood services. That has taken me off the point. Sorry, can you ask me again?

**Mr DIXON** — Should there be a link between professional learning courses to teaching — —

**Ms CARTER** — Subject to affordability, in principle, yes.

**Mr ELASMAR** — We all know parents are more important in relation to higher education and everything, but when you talk about the different cultures and backgrounds how do you get them involved, especially if they do not speak the language and things like that?

**Ms CARTER** — I think some of our members have developed terrific strategies. The Broadmeadows regeneration project is a particular one that is well worth getting more information about. They have adopted a range of strategies. One is their close partnerships with schools and getting the school principals to be very up-front with communities about the importance of early childhood. They have had community leaders talk to the community about the importance of early childhood, but mostly I think they have just made the environments welcoming. They have had some co-locations on school sites, where parents have got to bring their other kids so they come there. If they are persuaded that they should explore at least the importance of early childhood, they will come to the kindergarten, and through effectively being encouraged to help the kindergarten, volunteering at the kindergarten in a range of different ways such as reading to the children or assisting with various exercises.

**Mr ELASMAR** — In the end you find them doing their roles and they participate in all of this?

**Ms CARTER** — Partly it is because they actually meet other parents, so they do not necessarily have to speak English. Having bilingual staff is obviously important, and a lot of the assistants now tend to be bilingual or multilingual, so they also employ multilingual staff and create steps towards employment of qualified staff that parents themselves can take up. I think as the parents come along and watch their children on a day-to-day basis they see increasingly that they could actually do some of this work themselves and gain the confidence to actually do that, so they have had some success in actually getting parents to go and undertake study with, I think, Victoria University and one of the TAFEs to get certificates in early childhood education.

Can I just say that in terms of payment for better qualifications we have supported Validation for kindergarten teachers, and effectively that provides a career pathway and results in increased pay for the teachers who have demonstrated their commitment to ongoing professional development and to mentoring other teachers.

**The CHAIR** — You have shared with us some very useful insights into what you would hope kindergarten staff members would be learning as part of a professional development program. I am interested to get your insight into what happens now, sort of thing — how many courses are presently available, how many kindergarten teachers are taking that up and what has to be done to move further along that path.

**Ms CARTER** — Yes. I think one of the current barriers is that they are entitled to something like four professional development days per year — I think they must do four professional development days per year. For kindergartens, that is a cost they have to backfill for those days. Kindergarten teachers know that so it is a dual pressure, if you like, to not do a lot more, unless they do it in their own time. There are teachers who are doing professional development in their own time, but I would not describe it as the standard. Partly it is a cultural thing and we have to shift the culture to understand that if you want to be a professional, you need to do professional development on an ongoing basis. But I do not see a lot, really, of professional development available for kindergarten teachers yet in a structured fashion. The Lady Gowrie centre does quite a lot, and there are opportunities like the KPV conference. Our KPV Solutions project will be, I think, a strong step in the right direction in terms of providing in the field opportunities for teachers that should be attractive to them. In the preliminary pilot of that approach that Monash University has undertaken, there has been good take-up. I think I have perhaps only answered part of your question.

**The CHAIR** — You have gone a fair way down the track. I suppose the other issue then is, just going back to the earlier part of what you talked about, about wanting more people to train up to degree level?

**Ms CARTER** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — What are the barriers that we need to be aware of?

**Ms CARTER** — I think people are training up to degree level. The training currently enables them to teach in schools as well as early childhood settings, and increasingly that is where they are going. So we do have to make clear government support for early childhood education as well as early childhood child care. It is not really clear to the field that the support is there.

**The CHAIR** — So it is a retention issue as much as anything?

**Ms CARTER** — It is a retention issue — well, it is not so much a retention issue because once you get the kindergarten teachers in, they stay. They are the most experienced of the workforce, as well; they do not have the churn that you tend to get in the childhood sector. The average level of experience is about 11 years, but it is getting the new graduates in and making them feel adequately supported.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Meredith.

**Ms CARTER** — My pleasure.

**The CHAIR** — That has been very useful. We will be able to look over that material in more detail, and we will get back to you if we require any more information from you or want to follow up on some of that.

**Witness withdrew.**





# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

### **Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning**

Melbourne — 18 September 2008

#### Members of the Sub-Committee

Mr M. Dixon	Mr G. Howard
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr N. Kotsiras
Mr P. Hall	

Chair: Mr G. Howard  
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford  
Research Officer: Ms J. Hope  
Research Officer: Ms C. Whiteman  
Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Ms J. Walsh, secretary, and  
Mr M. Hammond, policy coordinator, Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, Victorian branch; and  
Ms K. Seadon, assistant director, Perry Street Community Child Care Centre.

**The CHAIR** — Next we are hearing from the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. Welcome. You understand that we are undertaking an inquiry into teacher professional learning across the state and that today we are particularly looking at the early childhood area. We are pleased the LHMU has come along to share with us their views on opportunities for professional development in the child-care, kindergarten area, but I suppose their membership is particularly in the child-care area?

**Ms WALSH** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Jess, I understand you will be doing a fair bit of the talking.

**Ms WALSH** — The master of ceremonies.

**The CHAIR** — But I see we have Matthew and Kylie here, too, to perhaps add some advice, perhaps when we get to questions. I hand over to you for a little while, and then we will have some questions.

**Ms WALSH** — I am Jess Walsh; I am the state secretary of the LHMU in Victoria. We represent child-care workers, particularly in the long-day-care sector. I have with me Kylie Seadon, who is the assistant director of the Perry Street Community Child Care Centre. Kylie has more than 16 years experience working in long-day care, and she is also the holder of a bachelor degree in early childhood development. Also here is Matt Hammond, who is the policy coordinator for the LHMU. One of our key goals is to improve the level of qualifications in the long-day-care sector, so we are keen to have the opportunity to talk with you about how to do that.

I will focus my comments on three areas. Firstly, I will touch on why improved qualifications are needed in the long-day care sector. Secondly, we will talk about what the barriers are to people getting improved qualifications in the sector. I think Kylie will be fairly instrumental in that discussion. Then we will put forward a couple of ideas about what could happen to improve the levels of qualification in the long-day care sector. We have provided to the committee a written submission that provides some background to all of those topics.

Firstly, then, why are more qualifications needed in the long-day care sector? Almost 50 per cent of the workforce working in this sector has no formal qualification whatsoever, and we think that is a problem. We know parents and the community more broadly expect the people who are looking after and developing their children in those crucial early years to have some formal level of qualification. There is also about 30 per cent turnover a year in the long-day care workforce. That is associated partly with a lack of career path and a lack of career opportunity that is in some way tied to improving qualifications. Again we need to deal with that question of high turnover because it is crucial that we are able to provide a continuity of care for the children that are in long-day care. Again, in those key crucial early development years parents and the community expect their children to be cared for by people who are able to stay in the position for the period in which their children are in care.

Finally, of course there is a growing demand for more qualifications in the sector because of federal and state government policy. Both the federal and state governments have committed to providing universal access to four-year-old learning — that is, teacher led — and increasingly four-year-olds are in the long-day care sector. The long-day care sector provides the hours of care that are the most convenient for parents, so increasingly that is where four-year-olds are.

If we are going to provide four-year-old learning — that is, teacher led — in the long-day care sector, then we have an issue to deal with there. The pay in the long-day care sector is probably about 25 per cent lower than it is in schools. So the question is: how are we going to attract teachers into the sector to be paid 25 per cent less than they would get paid when working in schools? Our view is that we need to commit to the workforce that is already there, that is already demonstrating its commitment to working in the long-day care sector, and we need to provide opportunities for people who are there to upskill and improve their qualifications.

The specific model we have is to create some pathways and some articulation between the different levels of qualification that exist now. Our proposal is that in order to get a greater supply of teachers in long-day care who can provide the four-year-old learning programs we need to be able to transition people from diplomas to degrees. In order to do that we need to get people transitioned from the certificate III qualification, the basic qualification in the sector, up to diplomas. In order to do that, we need to get the 50 per cent of people who are currently not qualified in any way to get the certificate III. That is what we would like to do: create that pathway that supports people in this sector to improve and upgrade their training. There are a number of barriers to doing that, and the

barriers are around the opportunities that people actually have at those different levels of qualification, or the people who are unqualified to actually make that commitment and get trained. I might ask Kylie to outline what some of those barriers are from her own experience.

**Ms SEADON** — Certainly a large percentage of child-care workers have no qualifications, as Jess said. Some of the barriers to gaining a qualification, like a minimum certificate III, are time away from the centre — away from their job — to actually go and study. At the moment it is usually one day a week. The problem that child-care centres have is the backfilling of those people's positions. As you know, centres are often struggling, and their main finance is actually spent on staff. So when you actually have to backfill the positions of staff members who go and study, it actually takes a large chunk out of your budget. We are asking that these people are funded so that we can actually get those people trained up for backfilling.

Also, getting the certificate III people qualified with a diploma also requires a lot of support. A lot of these people have families. Often they need time out; they struggle to do it in their own time, so these people need time out of the centres as well, so their positions need to be backfilled. At the moment that is a really difficult request for child-care centres.

**Ms WALSH** — One additional barrier we would probably add is the cost of actually doing the training when the cost falls on the individual to actually pay for themselves.

**Ms SEADON** — Yes. Often we will have schemes where the child-care centre will pay the cost study for a person to do their certificate III, but the actual backfilling of that person's position is a cost that child-care centres just do not have in their budgets.

**The CHAIR** — But most centres would be prepared to support their staff by covering the cost of certificate III training?

**Ms SEADON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Just in following up, in terms of what you were saying, is the one day a week just for the certificate III courses, or you could, if you wanted to, go on to do a diploma at one day a week level or even a degree at one day a week?

**Ms SEADON** — I am not so sure about degrees because the universities operate differently, but with TAFE, certainly it is a one day a week thing they do at the moment; yes, give or take, it is generally a day a week.

**Mr DIXON** — Just while we are on that, can I ask about the articulation between the certificate III and further qualifications? Has that been ironed out? Is that a bit more fluid than it used to be, or is it still a major barrier?

**Ms WALSH** — I do not think there is any specific model at the moment that describes that articulation, that says, for example, 'If you have a cert III, this is exactly how we will recognise that in the diploma, and if you have a diploma, this is exactly how we will recognise that in a degree', and there is also the recognition of prior learning component that needs to be dealt with in that as well, so if you have a cert III and that gives you a heads-up in a diploma, how is the experience that you might have had working in a centre for the last 10 or 15 years going to count towards that as well.

**Ms SEADON** — To add to that, currently TAFE structures the courses so the student has to do a certificate III first and then when they have completed that they have to do a diploma, so it is like two-and-a-half years straight through.

**Mr DIXON** — Would there be students who would be quite happy to just do the one or the diploma straight off?

**Ms SEADON** — Certainly. That has been a source of frustration in our centre because we have two students studying certificate III at the moment, and one of them who has shown a lot of potential would prefer to have just done the diploma straight up. It would have saved her and us a lot of cost, but she had to do the certificate III first. That is the system at the moment. It is a bit frustrating for us, but that is how it is.

**Ms WALSH** — I think Kylie has also really outlined some of the solutions to those barriers that we see as well, and certainly dealing with the cost issue is critical and, as Kylie said, it is not just about the cost of the course; it is not just about the course fees. It is the ability of the child-care worker to be backfilled while they pursue the study. There is a model that exists in Victoria that does that at the moment. It is the early childhood teacher scholarships for pathway students scheme. That is providing 50 two-year scholarships for diploma holders to get a degree, to upgrade to a degree, as long as they commit to staying in the long day-care sector for two years after they get their degree. A key part of that model is providing subsidies to the employers to release staff for, I think it is, one day a week.

**Mr HAMMOND** — It is 20 days over the two years.

**Ms WALSH** — Twenty days over the two years, so it is a bit of a lower threshold of release than you want to see, but nonetheless that program is there; it is an innovative program that recognises the barriers that people face. It is a fairly limited program in terms of size. There are only 50 scholarships and we have a massive skills shortage and labour shortage in the sector, and it is also there to articulate between a diploma and a degree, so we would be looking for similar programs at an expanded scale that also allow those other levels of articulation that we describe, so unqualified to certificate III, certificate III to diploma as well, but we do think that that is a good model. It is just a little limited in scope.

**The CHAIR** — Does that cover both the cost of the course as well as the backfilling, do we know?

**Ms WALSH** — Yes, it is a HECS relief model.

**Mr HAMMOND** — Yes, it contributes \$6000 towards it.

**Ms WALSH** — We also think that if we are able to achieve that sort of model on a larger scale and for more levels of qualification, we would also like to ensure that any funding that is made available goes to the existing workforce. It does not make sense to us, if there is a limited pool of money, if you have a choice between providing that to someone who already is working in the sector and perhaps has a cert III, any sort of relief should go to those people before it goes to people who are outside the sector because those people are already there and they have shown their commitment to staying in long day care. That is really the first solution to try and expand that sort of program. The second solution is to figure out a model for doing RPL, which is recognition of prior learning. I think, particularly for unqualified staff — the 50 per cent of people who are unqualified — we have people who have been working in the sector for a long period of time. They may have various challenges in their own life. They may be working full time. They may be from a non-English-speaking background. They may be single parents. They may be not single parents but the sole carer of children and, for them, the thought of going and spending days and hours in a formal education setting is prohibitive. It is prohibitive both in terms of the total amount of time that they have available to do other things and it is also prohibitive in terms of perhaps the confidence that people have about accessing training in a formal setting. Did you want to talk about the example of the woman in your centre?

**Ms SEADON** — Yes. As I said, we have several students in our centre at the moment. One of them is studying for her bachelor degree. She is a single parent, and yesterday I spent a lot of time talking with her about staying in the course because she was really struggling financially to study as well as work and support her child, pay the rent, and I just think that if there was a different way for these people to go about gaining these qualifications, then there would be more people taking it on.

Also in respect of the RPL, we had two students in our centre a couple of years ago. They were long-term child-care workers; they had worked for years in the industry without any qualification. We suggested that they do a certificate III because we felt for them to grow within the industry they should take on some further training. After a lot of support these people finally took that little step, which was quite scary for them. They got a lot of recognition of prior learning and were able to do the certificate III in a very short time of six weeks because they were able to demonstrate that they already had a lot of skill. If they were not able to do that, I do not think they would have gone through with it.

**The CHAIR** — So that is one particular TAFE that you have had success with in terms of recognition of prior skill?

**Ms SEADON** — Yes. They did it through the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, the Lady Gowrie training.

**The CHAIR** — We are hearing from them later this morning.

**Mr DIXON** — Just on recognition of prior learning, is that definition of ‘learning’, work experience or professional learning and development as well?

**Ms SEADON** — It is a combination. Basically we are talking about people who have worked for 10 years. They work on the learning programs as much as a qualified diploma person would. They contribute to those learning programs. They do observations of children. They interact with parents, they liaise, and they do in-service training. All of those things when we put them together create almost a certificate III. So for them to be able to just take a few weeks to do those little bits and pieces that they need, it is really successful, especially with people who are not confident about taking on further training. There is a lot in our industry like that.

**Ms WALSH** — My understanding about the reforms in the vocational education and training sector that have just been worked through now is that it would be up to child-care centres like Kylie’s to get together with the employees who work there and then get together with the local TAFE to try to figure out how to get that recognition of the centre’s employees’ prior learning. The contestability model that encourages people to seek out different training providers and for different training providers to market themselves in different ways, I guess, puts quite a lot of onus back on the individuals to be able to advocate for themselves with the TAFE about what their prior learning is. One of the things that we would like to work on — and I did get the opportunity to meet with Minister Allan about this only very recently — is to try to figure out a more systematic way of factoring that recognition of prior learning in so that individuals are not having to advocate just for themselves.

**Mr DIXON** — The review of the Victorian Institute of Teaching has recommended that early childhood workers be registered as teachers as such. What are the implications of that for your sector?

**Ms WALSH** — I am not familiar with that.

**Mr HAMMOND** — As part of the overall workforce review campaign that we are working on, the notion of registration in early childhood is certainly something that we are looking at. What we are thinking is broadly that we are looking at a national system of registration. That is certainly part of our longer term campaign process.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of models of training up, what you are saying is the one day a week on is the common one, but there are obviously other options, and we will follow some of those up with representatives from Lady Gowrie when we meet with them later. Have you seen other options that are more flexible and more attractive to some of your members?

**Ms SEADON** — There is a range of options out there. It really depends on your individual circumstances — for example, when I did my bachelor training I chose the pathways program with the Melbourne University, where I did it all online and used my workplace as part of my training as well. But there were times when I did have to step away from the workplace, and they had to backfill me. That suited me as a mother and a full-time worker. There are other people who cannot work like that, because you have to be quite disciplined to do your work on your own.

**The CHAIR** — But that option is still out there?

**Ms SEADON** — As far as I know it is, but Melbourne University has changed a lot of its courses, so I do not know if that is still available. There are other universities offering it in Australia, but you have to be extremely disciplined and motivated, and a lot of people find they cannot work like that because you work alone. Others need to go in and have those lectures and have that stimulation of other people to learn, which happens in the other courses, but then they require time out — you have to juggle your shifts and all sorts of things.

**The CHAIR** — As well as formal training upgrades, our inquiry is obviously looking at ongoing professional development for staff overall, which might be something done on a regular basis with staff. I am interested to get a sense of what is presently happening in your workplace, Kylie, and how that might be improved, and what are the views of staff about ongoing professional learning.

**Ms SEADON** — Again that reflects the general confidence of child-care workers. We have in-service training that is compulsory — i.e., first aid, anaphylaxis, all those things that child-care workers and kindergarten teachers have to have. Then, aside from that, there are the ones that you can voluntarily go and do — all sorts of

job-related training, everything from developing learning programs, the different theories of learning, all those sorts of things, and behaviour management. Again, it takes a lot of encouragement to get a lot of people out into those. They feel uncomfortable going to formal training. That falls back on the costs of the centre. We have to pay for the training, and we also have to pay to backfill that person, because this training occurs in work hours. It is unfair to ask people to do training on a Saturday that is work related especially if they are not being paid for it, and if the actual pay they receive does not reflect that kind of commitment anyway.

**The CHAIR** — We heard from the Community Child Care Association earlier, which said that they run a number of courses for a couple of hours a week in the evening. Do some of your staff take advantage of those types of opportunities?

**Ms SEADON** — Certainly the higher trained staff will often attend those because they have a higher responsibility. The certificate IIIs, who are the people who are not trained and who we are concerned with, often will not go to those out of hours because they only earn minimum pay and have minimum responsibilities. It is really hard to get those people into out-of-hours training.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of the way child-care centres work overall is there collegiate time where you work on sharing knowledge and mentoring or whatever, or sharing skills on a less formal basis, or does it work that people are on for their slots of time, whether it is a whole day, and it is just go, go, go and there is not that much time for that sort of situation?

**Ms SEADON** — Yes, my day yesterday was just like how you described it. I spent an hour with a student who needed a lot of support to get through what she had to do. She comes in every Wednesday and she needs a lot of mentoring. I am passionate about the mentoring because I think it is important in getting staff passionate about what they are doing and having that example, but at the same time I was answering the phone, directing staff, trying to do the pay and talking to union colleagues. It is really hard; you need someone in the centre who can mentor these students without having to worry about running the centre and working in the rooms. It is really difficult, but mentoring is a very important part of the process.

**Ms WALSH** — Even really before we get to time for professional development we need time to do programs for the children in the centres. There is no mandated amount of time that people who are providing developmental programs get to do that preparation. Effectively if you are part of the child-care staff and you are counting the ratio of carers to children in the centre on that day, then that is what you are doing in the centre on that day. One of the key asks that we have of the federal government is to provide sufficient funding to enable people to be off the floor and out of their rooms with time to develop a program, let alone perhaps doing the next higher level of professional development.

**Ms SEADON** — It falls back on the girls who work in the room. They have a student in the room with them, so they are dealing with 10 babies and there are two staff and they have a student in there as well that they are supposed to be training and observing and then assessing. The last couple of times we have had students through in that capacity it has been really difficult to give that student the support they need. It is a really hard ask of staff who are already burnt out with the whole staff ratio business, but that is a different story.

**The CHAIR** — Just to gain an understanding of Perry Street, who manages it and how is it funded?

**Ms SEADON** — We are a community-based centre; a not-for-profit parent-managed centre.

**The CHAIR** — I imagine the other issue that we would find if we looked at the child-care centre going from some of the private providers who look to maximise the value they get from their staff and so on is that it would make it even more challenging than maybe a community-based one that wants to provide as much ethos into professional development and staff support.

**Ms SEADON** — Yes, we try and really support our staff in further training.

**The CHAIR** — That is good.

**Ms SEADON** — Probably we do more than a lot of other centres, but at the same time it puts enormous stress on the budget. I am avoiding the treasurer at the moment!

**Ms WALSH** — If we know that all the things we have described are so important to the quality of care and development of people in the crucial area of 0 to four years of age then we cannot leave those things to the ability of particular parent groups or particular dedicated individuals to figure those things out. We need mandated programs that would cover workers who are caring for children in the community sector, the corporate child-care sector and in the private stand-alone sector as well.

**The CHAIR** — That has been very useful in giving us a sense of what is happening in the child-care area and what you hope to achieve in terms of further professional learning.

**Mr HAMMOND** — If the committee is interested, I have some brochures about our broader Big Steps campaign, and we would be quite happy to table them.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you all for your contribution.

**Witnesses withdrew.**





# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

### **Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning**

Melbourne — 18 September 2008

#### Members of the Sub-Committee

Mr M. Dixon

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Elasmarr

Mr N. Kotsiras

Mr P. Hall

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms J. Hope

Research Officer: Ms C. Whiteman

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witness

Ms M. Fox, branch president, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria).

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Marlene, representing Early Childhood Australia (Victoria). As you are aware, we have been hearing from a range of early childhood bodies this morning with regard to our inquiry on teacher professional learning. It has been a very interesting morning for us, and we are obviously interested in your input to add to what we have learnt. If you want to share your insights, we will probably have some questions for you.

**Ms FOX** — I thought I would start by giving a little bit of background where Early Childhood Australia sits within the picture. Having had a look at the names of the people you have on the list, Early Childhood Australia would be seen as an umbrella organisation that most of those groups that have spoken to you are members of, and it has a volunteer committee as in it is not people's paid employment to be part of ECA. They do it as those elected from the membership and actually run that organisation. There are some components of it that are funded, and I will speak to those when I am going through.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today. We understand the inquiry has so far focused on teachers in schools and that you would like to address professional learning for teachers and other professionals involved in early childhood education and care. Early Childhood Australia has a focus on children from birth to eight, so that very clearly covers that area in what is traditionally seen as an early childhood component up to the age of eight. Early Childhood Australia was formerly known as the Australian Early Childhood Association and was established in 1938. It works with government, early childhood professionals, parents, other carers of young children and various lobby groups to secure the best range of options and outcomes for children as they grow and develop. It is a national umbrella organisation for children's services and is seen as a national peak, non-profit, non-government organisation acting in the interests of children from birth to eight years.

It publishes a quarterly research journal, a members magazine, newsletters, a Web watch service and maintains a highly regarded publications unit publishing curriculum-based booklets and materials. The ECA national and ECA Victoria maintain an early childhood field-based website. The mission statement is:

Early Childhood Australia will advocate to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

Two particular components I want to highlight today — and I have handed out a copy — are that Early Childhood Australia developed the early childhood code of ethics, and that is now a document that is Australia-wide and has just been updated. The original document is approximately 10 years old, and it has now been updated. That is used across Australia and within most tertiary or all tertiary institutions that train early childhood staff. It is one of the key documents that they use in relation to training and professional development, so I thought that you might like to have a copy of that.

Early Childhood Australia, Victorian branch, which is how I am here today, has an added responsibility that other states do not have. It is something quite particular that links into this teacher training aspect, which is that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, through its Office for Children runs the Early Childhood Australia (Victorian Branch) Qualifications Approval Committee, which provides advice on comparability of overseas and interstate qualifications to the Victorian qualifications as set out in the children's services regulations and the Victorian kindergarten policy procedures and funding criteria.

We, on behalf of the department, undertake to screen and assess all qualifications that are not Victorian-based and provide input into the revision of existing and the development of new teacher training courses for early childhood. It is a fairly significant role that we have that other ECA branches around Australia do not have, so that is a fairly strong working relationship. All courses have to go via the ECA qualifications committee prior to being approved to ensure they will actually meet the requirements of an early childhood qualification within those documents that I have already mentioned.

There is a number of points within the document in relation to the general reference questions and the focus questions. I will just briefly go through a couple of those and then obviously be open to any questions you might have. One of the comments we wanted to make was that the research very clearly shows that the quality and the number of those qualified staff have an enormous impact on the quality of the program and what is provided for children. So as a result of that, and having that input into the training courses and the qualifications, we would really like to stress the importance of a very robust pre-service tertiary training system at TAFE and university level. Our role within that in approving courses means that we can look very closely at what they actually involve and what they entail. That makes us unpopular sometimes when people have developed a course which they think

will meet the requirements but it does not matter and they are sent back to redesign it to ensure that it actually covers birth to eight and is a very strong component of early childhood development.

The quality of the qualifications is also very important. There is a big component of RTO-provided training, and there are also a lot of RTO providers at the TAFE-type level, at the diploma-type level of qualification, and we would like to ensure that that maintains a very rigorous look at who offers the training, how it is offered and how people are actually assessed to have regard to a qualification. It is often the case that qualifications may have been given with a very big component of RPL so that people are presenting with qualifications that may have had a very minimal component of actual training within them. If that is going to have a link and a lead on, that needs to be looked at very carefully if that is going to be a way of transitioning into other training.

The other issues that we looked at was around the commitment to ongoing professional learning and training. It is a really strong component. There are lots of influences on that in relation to how staff can access that training, such as if they are working a lot of face-to-face contact hours and how you actually get release from that. Early childhood staff, unlike other teaching staff, are covered by the children's services regulations, so there are very strict requirements around qualifications of staff and staff-to-child ratios and those sorts of things in relation to the regulations that mean you can only release staff if you are going to continue to meet those requirements within the services and centres.

There is a concern, as I said, that it is very difficult for staff to access training if they are in services where they cannot actually be released to undertake that training. One of the roles from a government perspective is around how you build in a requirement to have a certain level of PD so that that argument does not have to be fought by staff on the floor before they actually get access to training. We also think there needs to be a very strong commitment to ethical practice, and that can link very closely with ethics, which, as I said, are very highly regarded. That has an input in relation to staff's work with other staff, with children and with families, and a commitment to research and their work in the community.

There has also been some interesting research overseas that looks at what happens when you raise the entry standards for teaching for undergraduates, and when you target best-quality graduates so that you actually only target a certain percentage of graduates to be attracted into the teaching field. A number of overseas countries have had a very strong look at not allowing people to get into teaching unless they are in a certain cohort at the top of marks and results so that they are then looking at what impact that has when you change the quality of the people undertaking the teacher training and what impact that has. We hope that research is having a look at it from an early childhood perspective as well as from a primary and secondary teaching perspective.

There were a couple of other interesting parts in relation to cross-sectional links between early childhood and primary, which of course is a big issue at the moment, because the Office for Children has walked across the road and round the corner and is now part of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. An interesting comment was made that it is now seen as a super-department, and it must be because children's services has actually joined it. I do not know if that went down too well with primary, but it certainly opens up lots of opportunity for shared training and shared understanding. But a big concern in the early childhood field is that that does not happen in a way that swamps early childhood with a downward-looking focus from primary and does not allow early childhood to be seen as a specialised area of learning and teaching and therefore of professional development. They are some of the issues that have come up out of the focus questions and the guidelines. I am open to questions.

**Mr DIXON** — What are your organisation's views vis-a-vis the current state of articulation from certificate courses to diplomas and degrees? It seems to be a bit all over the place. Where is it heading?

**Ms FOX** — One of the issues that came up that I alluded to was that there are ways that you can obtain things like the certificate III and the diploma of children's services from an RTO and with a big component of RPL. The risk with that is that you then cannot, for obvious reasons, articulate that into a university course and continue on, because you do not have any sort of basis that allows you to see what sort of level the person is at. I think it is really important to have a continual pathway so that people can start at whatever and continue on if they are interested in doing that and if they have the support and skill to be able to do that. But I think we need to look very closely at how many places you can obtain a certificate III and what sort of background the people have who run those courses. If you want to make a situation where that is a relevant training level and allows people to articulate right through to the university level and on to masters, then you cannot have situations where people can go out,

have a morning of ticking things and provide information about what experience they have had with no reference to the fact that they might have had 20 years of experience, but it might have been in a very poor-quality service and what that accounts for. There certainly needs to be a component of RPL, but that is not enough to allow you to go right through the system, so it needs to be strengthened. Lots of people can offer lots of little courses. I think we need to be ensuring that the quality of what is offered is looked at very strongly so that the people doing the courses get a good-value qualification that is recognised. You cannot at the moment articulate into a university course with the RTOs that do not provide a graded system — I think that is my understanding — except in one situation where there is an arrangement with a private provider where that happens, and those qualifications are not recognised in Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — That is where I was going to lead into. I was going to try and gain a comparison. I do not know whether you are in a position to provide a comparison between levels of training in Victoria as compared to other states and, with those issues of professional learning, whether differences happen in other states that we ought to look to?

**Ms FOX** — It is a really interesting issue. In fact next month we have a national council meeting. All the representatives from around Australia will go to an ECA council meeting; it will be held in Canberra this year. One of the difficulties about making position papers and comments about issues relating to training, qualifications and regulations is that they are all different in all of the states. That is one of the issues. So if you have a qualification from this university in this state it may not meet our requirements because, for example, they may have removed the requirement to do a placement for children under three, and our qualification requires you to have done all the training right across from nought to eight.

There are differences in qualification levels, and there are differences in the regulations in each state and what those regulations require. There is no regulation in Victoria that requires a degree-trained person in child care. In New South Wales, once you go over 29 children over the age of four, I think it is, you must have a degree-qualified staff member. Working across all of those things is very difficult. There is a requirement that you are a degree-trained early childhood person to be regarded as a teacher. That is certainly across-the-board, but how they all relate is very difficult. Anything that simplified that would probably reduce the workload at the qualifications committee quite significantly.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. But in looking at professional learning, both in terms of the formal increasing of the level of your qualification from certificate to diploma and so on, but also in terms of other ongoing professional learning, do any states do it better than Victoria? Are there any programs — —

**Ms FOX** — I think everyone just does it very differently. I am probably not in a position to compare them completely, but I know they are done very differently. One of the issues is that Victoria does not have a curriculum framework, and that is something that is being looked at now by DEECD, and I sit on one of the several panels that has input into that. That makes Victoria stand alone a bit at the moment, unfortunately, in that it does not have an early childhood framework or an early childhood curriculum. That is something that is being addressed. I think that when that is in place and when other things are in place it will allow for a more equitable comparison and for perhaps ideas and information to be shared across state boundaries.

The fact that early childhood is now part of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development probably brings it into line with some other places, but it does not necessarily mean that all of it will be positive. One of the issues for early childhood is that because you are a small and specialised component within something else it is very easy to get lost in the system, or you have to learn to speak the new lingo of the education department as opposed to that of the Department of Human Services. There is a very strong commitment to ensuring that that specialised area of early childhood and the skills and understanding of how children learn, rather than teaching subjects, is actually maintained. I think there are lots of opportunities at the moment, because we are part of a new department, to explore that further — and they are some of those sorts of cross-institutional training opportunities — but also not to get left behind. It is not about learning more about primary; it is about learning more about the field you are in.

**Mr DIXON** — What is your view of early childhood educators being registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching?

**Ms FOX** — The report is in my bag at the moment for light reading at home. There is a barrier there at the moment because if you are an early childhood teacher and working in the field you cannot register with VIT, despite the fact that as an early childhood-trained teacher you have dual qualifications. But if you take the teacher component out and put that in VIT, you now have another divide. What Early Childhood Australia does at its qualifications committee is look at all early childhood staff that come under the children's services regulations. If you slice off the teachers and put them with VIT, there is still a component, which is the diploma-trained staff and where they sit, left without anything. The other thing is that, from my reading — but, as I said, I have not read the large document yet — my understanding is that VIT has a very different role: it is about the registration of teachers. We would very much like to have a registration of early childhood staff, but it will not necessarily fit within VIT. It could be a specialised part of VIT, but the VIT organisation as it sits certainly does not have an understanding of the field that would enable it to do what is there.

My understanding — and, as I said, I have not read the complete document yet — is that what the qualifications committee does for ECA is very different. VIT does not approve courses, does not look at those sorts of things, does not approve and compare with overseas qualifications, does not do the sort of work that ECA does. If you just picked up ECA and put it within VIT, it would not necessarily do the same things. In early childhood we would certainly like to have a registration board or a registration program or service for all early childhood staff. That would then incorporate the two-year-trained diploma staff as well. I am not sure that that is one of the recommendations coming out of VIT yet.

**The CHAIR** — I am interested to get a sense of, with this inquiry, what recommendations you would hope to see us come up with in terms of early childhood.

**Ms FOX** — Certainly, continuing along the line of VIT, to have some clarity and a decision made about an early childhood registration board or set-up that allowed that whole professional aspect of being a registered teacher and those sorts of things to be there for early childhood staff. Because at the moment ECA is finding it very difficult to make long-term plans about where it goes with the qualifications committee. We have an enormous workload at the moment in relation to new courses, because it just happens that they all tend to start coming up for renewal. There is a big push in the TAFE system to put in a three-year teaching diploma to add onto their two-year-training diplomas. ECA is again responsible for overseeing the development of those courses. So if there could be some decision about where that is all heading, because we are not sure if we go down that path or we wait to see if our fundings continue from the department, whether it disappears into VIT, or whether we have to relocate our bit within VIT. There are a whole of lot of those questions that it would be really good to have some sort of direction on, certainly because that has an impact on the field.

The children's services regulations are due 28 May, I think it is, next year. There may be some ways within that document — and the regulatory impact statement or business impact statement for that has not been released yet — to strengthen up and be very clear about requirements, qualifications, PD and all of those things. There may be some way of incorporating those things within that document, now that we are part of a big department, even though early childhood is very different to the primary and secondary system — that is, the education system — because the education department employs all those staff and it does not within early childhood. So you cannot mandate for PD and those sorts of things within the system.

Early childhood staff have access to one curriculum day, or one non-contact day a year, and they are sitting alongside primary school staff that have four or five. So even in saying you would like to provide joint training, it would be impossible because one lot gets one day of release, by negotiation with its committees of management, and one gets mandated training. So because they come from two very different backgrounds, that is a bit of an issue, but it would be nice to see that some of the things that are offered to employed staff from the education department components were able to be offered to early childhood and in some way integrated.

It would also be nice to be able to provide some, I suppose, support and recognition for staff in early childhood who I think feel they are left or left behind. It is a very different sector to work in. Despite the fact that you have the same or higher qualifications than those in other teaching situations, there is literally no career structure, and there is not even built into the MECA award system recognition for higher learning. So for staff that are going off to do their masters and other further qualifications there is no remuneration even built into the system, and certainly no career structure. Getting that level of qualification does not guarantee you will get another type of position. It would be nice to see those as positives that perhaps come out of being part of a different department, we hope.

**The CHAIR** — Looking at your code of ethics, I see the section there in terms of seeing yourself as a professional. I would imagine there would be a number of people in the child-care sector who would relate to that, but there is a number who have no qualifications, as we are hearing — —

**Ms FOX** — About 70 per cent, I think.

**The CHAIR** — That is right, 70 per cent who are doing it for the work and just feel they are low paid and so on. How do we raise their level of involvement to feel they want to take up professional development, that they want to be on the path of doing a better job, and so on?

**Ms FOX** — Personally, I think all staff should be encouraged to continue to undergo PD, regardless of whether or not they have a base qualification. I think that is probably easier within the not-for-profit sector because there is probably a bigger commitment to providing that for their staff in-house. Because there are costs involved it is a very difficult in a for-profit service, particularly a corporate for-profit service. It is partly about remuneration — that is, if you are not seen as very well remunerated, therefore is it worth providing you with any additional training? So part of it is that whole bigger picture thing about how you remunerate people who work with children.

The code of ethics is really relevant for and aimed at anyone working with young children. So it is not particularly aimed at qualified staff, although they would be the ones that logically look at that document, but it is certainly not aimed at them alone. It is a difficult area when, in the child-care field, for example, there is such a big component of a for-profit service; then that has another layer that you have to plough your way through in relation to PD. I think one of the big issues for staff when it comes to professional development, regardless of whether they are trained or qualified staff, is about the fact that they are counted as part of staff-child ratios. If those people are to undertake training within their work time, then someone has to fill their position; otherwise they are in breach of regulations. So often there is a double cost involved with training staff that may not be there for other services or situations. You cannot pop someone in from next door to keep an eye on the children, which you probably can do in some cases in other education settings; or you might do it in a way where you do one of those curriculum days where everyone has no contact with children and takes staff out to do it. It is a really big issue around backfilling and getting relief staff.

One of the other issue that links in is the ageing workforce and the ability to replace all those staff with the number of people going through and being trained. We lose quite a number of early childhood trained staff into the primary system, because they have a dual qualification, because there is a career structure, and because the remuneration is very different. If staff who are very keen to stay in early childhood were able to do that without disadvantaging themselves financially or as a future career, then I think you would have a very different workforce.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Marlene. That has certainly added to what we have already learnt today. It has been very useful indeed.

**Witness withdrew.**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

### Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 18 September 2008

#### Members of the Sub-Committee

Mr M. Dixon

Mr G. Howard

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Chair: Mr G. Howard

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#### Witness

Ms G. Howard, chief executive officer, Gowrie Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Ms Howard. As you are aware, the Education and Training Committee parliamentary committee has been looking at the issue of teacher professional learning, for the most part as it relates to school education, but today we are particularly looking at the early childhood area. We have met with a couple of groups ahead of you today, but a few of them have referred to activities that the Lady Gowrie centre has carried out in early childhood. Obviously, as your organisation directly provides professional learning, we are interested to know a little bit more about what you provide, what are the barriers and so on.

**Ms HOWARD** — Thank you. It is very nice to hear my colleagues have mentioned me before I started. I have sent you through something — just two pages. What I plan to do today is talk a little bit about our organisation firstly and then to identify some things I wanted to highlight in those sections, so if that suits — —

**The CHAIR** — That sounds good.

**Ms HOWARD** — As you know, I am Gilda Howard from Gowrie Victoria, formerly Lady Gowrie Child Centre, which is one of the leading providers of professional learning to the early childhood sector. We run professional learning sessions and also accredited training sessions, so we run the cert IIIs and diplomas as well, so we have quite a range of services. We also operate a demonstration child-care and kindergarten program in Carlton North where we are located. We also have a specialist early childhood bookshop, and we provide advice that is state funded and federally funded to staff across the state, and we are often a visiting point for international visitors as well, so we have quite a range of services.

What I wanted to do is just link this inquiry, I guess, to some of the COAG agenda items that are really going to impact very strongly on the early childhood profession, namely, around the 15 hours provision of kindergarten that is going to be implemented through that; also the 260 new centres that are going to be developed under a different management structure to what we are currently used to. That will have an impact on the professional learning requirements of staff. The new rating system that is going to be implemented with our quality assurance committee system, which is called QAIS, and then the early learning framework which I have identified in the written information I think is probably the most important thing on our agenda at the moment. The reason why I think this is a very important inquiry is that all the research would indicate that the higher quality staff, better trained staff get better outcomes for children, so there is a very strong connection between supporting staff and professional learning, so this is why I am particularly interested in this inquiry.

To give you a bit of an understanding of our range of services, in the last month we had 900 teachers, child-care workers and students come to our premises in Carlton for professional learning sessions. We had 344 additional people who were training for their cert III or diploma, and we had 100 visitors come to look at our program to see how you deliver best quality child care. It is quite a range and over the year we do have quite a spread of services. You have the paper. I am sure you have read every question — you know everything — but I would like to just highlight some things in each section rather than go through it. As I mentioned, the early years framework is the most important thing that has happened to the early child-hood sector for some time. In Victoria there is no set curriculum to be delivered, so everyone in Victoria runs a different curriculum. We now will have one curriculum that we will have to deliver that will fit into the national framework. Every other state across Australia has a curriculum, so we are going to be hit with a double-whammy; we are going to have to know about the curriculum and about the framework. That is obviously going to be the most professional learning need for staff. I have mentioned computer skills. It sounds like a very minor issue but if you are not savvy with computers these days, you are left behind. Staff are not savvy with computers; they do not often have access to it and they are not trained.

The other issue I wanted to bring up was articulating professional learning into accredited training. Another of the COAG agenda is to assist staff to train to cert III level. If we were able to articulate accredited professional development into accredited training programs, that would certainly help staff along the way to become able to be granted with certificates or diplomas, so I think that would be a really good way of articulating professional development. The question around early childhood education and care I think may have been developed out of having some sites that were running child-care programs and some sites running kindergarten programs, and that dichotomy between: is it care or education? As I have mentioned, most children are in a long day-care centre where there is no teacher, and the state government is doing a lot to try and encourage teachers into those sites. Obviously that is a really important move.

Again, if we want better outcomes for children, we need to have more highly qualified staff providing the programs, so you may find that when children transition into primary school, they will not have been with a teacher



for that year before school, and it is vital that we start looking at that — having teachers at that earlier age. At the Gowrie we have a teacher in every room, so right through from birth until five they all have teachers. If you want to have better quality programs, you have teachers. It is a simple equation.

When you are talking about schools and early childhood, there are lots of good examples of how that is already working well. Obviously those services that are co-located have a much better way of negotiating and working together. I have just cited one program we do with primary teachers where we run services for them around a play-based curriculum. It is a fairly simple way, but there are lots of other programs that are out there already making those connections.

You were asking about whole group training or individual centres. There is no research to say what is the most effective professional learning method for early childhood education. I will talk a little bit about that research later, but we do know incidentally that if a whole team is taken to training, we know we get better outcomes from that. For that to be done, it really needs to be outside operation hours. You cannot leave children, and I heard Marlene speaking about that earlier so I do not need to go over that, but it is important that everyone attends and everyone has the same understanding of professional learning. The other thing was: what do people do now. The majority of our training that we run is around compliance and around program planning. People come to those things. There are other issues they come to, but mostly they are driven by external factors. If there is a change of regulations, we need to go and do something about that. There is not a long-term plan about, 'For my professional life or for my career, I need to be doing these things'. Mainly — and I mention that further — there is not a lot of staff appraisal. There are not a lot of guidelines to assist staff to reflect on their own professional learning and their own requirements. Think of a team in a kindergarten — there are two staff members there, one is a teacher and one is an untrained assistant. Who do you talk to to get professional guidance? There is no system that actually accommodates that. Very few services have staff appraisal that would guide their professional learning.

On the barriers, I think we have talked about a few of those already — lack of financial support; staff doing this training often pay for their own training, their employer does not pay for them; they often have trouble getting relief staff; 40 per cent of our workforce are not qualified at all, so there is often no incentive for them to continue any professional learning; and there are no really clear career paths as well, which sometimes does not give you a motivating factor to actually go to professional learning. I did not want to end on a negative, because it actually is not a negative; we know that thousands of people come to us every year to in fact go to professional learning sessions. It is not that staff do not want to do it; it is just that there are a lot of barriers for them to actually get to those sessions.

I just wanted to revisit that issue around research. As I mentioned, there are no worldwide studies that have been done on what is the best way to provide professional learning for early childhood educators. I am involved in a research project with Deakin University currently, and we are trying to actually identify what those ways are. We need to know what is the most effective way, how we can motivate the staff, and then how we actually can get them to it, because they are motivated, but often there are barriers to participate.

**The CHAIR** — How long before you will have the answers?

**Ms HOWARD** — Actually the literature review is actually due in two more weeks, so we will have certainly some understanding of what has happened in the past and what the recommendation is from Deakin University as to how we should move forward.

**Mr DIXON** — What are your views on online delivery of professional development? You have said that there is a real issue with IT-savvy teachers and all that, but given that teachers are IT savvy, what are your views on that?

**Ms HOWARD** — Certainly there is room for it. This is a relationship-based industry sector. If you are assessing a person on how they relate to parents or children or their colleagues, you actually need to see that. I think there are some things you cannot do online, but certainly there is a lot that you can. At the moment we are investigating that and looking at what that split would be so that we would feel comfortable that they are still able to develop those relationships and those modules of certificates that we could do over the internet, if you like.

**The CHAIR** — But you do not offer any at the moment online?

**Ms HOWARD** — We do not currently, but that is our plan — that we will be moving into that.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Just on the courses, you mentioned that they are happy to start after-hours, or close the whole thing all day. What about holidays? Is that an option?

**Ms HOWARD** — We operate 50 weeks a year. The long day-care centres will operate up to 50 weeks a year; they do not close for school holidays. Only the sessional kindergartens would close for school holidays, but the majority operate all year. It is very difficult to actually find any time, and if they are operating from 7 in the morning to 7 at night as well it does restrict even time around that, too.

**The CHAIR** — Do you find that some kindergarten teachers are happy to do some of your courses in what would otherwise be a holiday period?

**Ms HOWARD** — They do, but we do not have as many courses because not all of them want to come, but some certainly will come.

**The CHAIR** — Do you offer your courses only out of Carlton, or do you do any outreach-type courses?

**Ms HOWARD** — No, we do regional courses as well. We try to target different regions in different years so that we can spread it around. It is very costly for us. Even then the country people still have to travel a long way to get to a central point — even when we take it out to them.

**The CHAIR** — So the courses that you would offer in the regions are just short courses to deal with specific issues that are identified as important?

**Ms HOWARD** — They are, but we have also run our certificate III and diplomas as well. For instance, we used to run them in Bendigo because we had a cohort of people who were really keen to do accredited training there. But mostly they are short term.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of the impediments that staff would find — I mean, obviously we are getting the message that opportunities for funding for backfilling might be important. We have heard that when there are staff without qualifications at all, as they are low paid, it is a bit of a challenge to get them to have the confidence to take on courses. Have you any advice in that area — of things that you have found that you have been able to do that inspire some of the people in the lower level of the sector to want to do some professional learning?

**Ms HOWARD** — As I mentioned earlier, the incentive is there; they really do want to do it, but it is about access. Some of the employment programs we have run have been very successful, where the cost of the tuition is paid for, and then the person will give their time or use their holidays. We have run certificate III, for instance, through employment programs, where their employer will give them the time off their work to go to the class or they will come in on Saturdays to do that.

You have got to find one or the other of the barriers and cover that, and then they will usually be very open to it. We have run programs targeting people over 45, for instance, who are current workers and do not have a qualification. They will come because they are in the right cohort; so they are with other people with similar life experiences and similar work experience. They will not feel intimidated by coming in that group, and it is about their feeling comfortable as well, especially those ones without any qualification at all. Of course they have always worked without qualifications, so there does not seem to be a need to do that. With the regulation change that is on the horizon, it may be that everyone will have to have a certificate III — that is the recommendation that is going around. That will really shift a lot of people to actually go through an accredited training program.

**Mr DIXON** — That is going to coincide with the national guidelines; everything at the same time.

**Ms HOWARD** — That is right. It is all going to happen at the same time.

**Mr DIXON** — Next year will be a big year for you.

**Ms HOWARD** — It is going to be a very big year. Also I think what we are going to find is that a lot of people are going to leave the sector, because the need for qualification and the need for the curriculum will be too challenging. The curriculum is going to affect people like family day carers. I have heard people predict that some networks will just shut down because they will not be able to get staff for them. They are people who have been home with their own children and who are looking after other children in the family day care scheme. They do not see a need to be qualified as child-care workers because they are mothers and they have the skills they require.

They do not get paid very much. I think they would just see that this is too big a step to take. There is going to be quite a lot of change that will happen around this losing of staff. Services will need to close down because they will not be viable.

**The CHAIR** — The last question I have relates to short-term professional learning courses. It sounds like you are able to be flexible and to pick up on the issues that staff in the sector might want to do a short course on, and therefore design a course that might be appropriate to that, but are you aware of any areas that may not be being picked up in terms of skill requirements that staff may be looking for?

**Ms HOWARD** — I think in fact the early childhood trainers in the sector are very good at identifying what is needed. We can see the needs and often we will run in-services around those things. I think we are very quick at responding to what those needs are. Sometimes it is difficult to run the programs if we cannot make them cost effective — for instance, I mentioned computer skills. There is definitely a need for that, but we are planning to run those sessions. We identify a need and then we try to meet it. Sometimes we are not able to; sometimes we try to attract government funding to assist us. It is usually a very reactive field in that respect to assist the staff.

**The CHAIR** — I meant to ask this of some of the other groups that have been along. When you say there are some kindergartens that only have one trained teacher and an assistant, would most teachers be involved in some sort of a cluster arrangement that could provide collegiate support?

**Ms HOWARD** — Yes, they are. Most of the kindergartens around the state are now part of cluster management groups or they are part of a local government group. They have that ability to liaise on a fairly regular basis, but that depends on how that group is organised. They do not have the day-to-day professional dialogue that you would get in a team with a larger group. But sure, they do have that. The state government also provides children's services advisers who oversee the management of services, so they are available. But they are not often available on the day-to-day basis where you are needing that collegiate support.

**The CHAIR** — Does a similar sort of thing happen within the day care area; that you would get some linkages across a range of day care providers to share information?

**Ms HOWARD** — That can happen, but they have enough of a team on their own that they can rely on. Most centres would have 14 staff; that would probably be the smallest. You would find that you had a colleague there who you could liaise with and who could assist you with things. But of course when you move into the private and the corporate sectors with long day carers, they have a lot more centres that they are linked to.

**The CHAIR** — That seems to be all our questions. Thank you, Gilda. Again, it has been very useful to add to the information we have been gathering. Hopefully, we will be able to do justice to early childhood in terms of our report as a result of the feedback we have got from today.

**Ms HOWARD** — I have a question of the committee. I am just wondering what will happen with this information, where it will go and whether people will have access to the findings?

**The CHAIR** — Indeed they will. Our report is due to be completed by the end of this year. We will see whether we get to present it physically by the end of the year. Once it is presented it will be available as a public report. We will also be sending out copies to most of the people who have contributed, but also the report goes to the government for it to make a formal response. The formal response will be made public once it is available.

**Ms HOWARD** — Thank you; that is great.

**Committee adjourned.**