



**3 February 2014**

**Childcare and Early Childhood Learning**

**Community Child Care Response to the Productivity Commission Issues Paper December 2013**

Community Child Care Association (CCC) as the peak body for community based early and middle childhood education and care children's services in Victoria is pleased to submit a response to the Productivity Commission Issues Paper on Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

CCC is the Victorian Branch of a national peak body for community managed and not for profit children's services, Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) and carries out the role of ACCS National Secretariat. As the Victorian branch of National Out of School Hours Association (NOSHSA), CCC is also the Victorian peak body for Outside School Hours Care Services.

CCC supports the ACCS submission and agrees with the ACCS recommendations for the future direction of early and middle childhood education and care. ACCS recommendations are included as Appendix 1. In addition to the evidence and recommendations contained in the ACCS submission CCC is happy to provide these further comments to specific questions and issues raised in the Productivity Commission Issues Paper and the following additional evidence and commentary relevant to the Victorian context. ACCS conducted a second wave *Trends in Community Children's Services Survey* (TICCSS) at the end of 2012 (ACCS, 2013). This survey was designed to track how community managed services are progressing with the implementation of the NQF. Over 140 Victorian services participated in this survey with 93% of these being not for profit. This submission draws on the Victorian data collected in this survey.

**1. What is this study about?**

***What role if any, should the different levels of governments play in childcare and early childhood education***

CCC believes that governments should invest in high quality early [and middle] childhood education and care (ECEC) and that this investment is important not just for children and families but for Australia's economic future. The OECD has carried out analysis over time and across many countries about the importance of high investment and advises that

*"A growing body of research recognises that early childhood education and care (ECEC) brings a wide range of benefits, for example, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large.*

*But all these benefits are conditional on “quality”. Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects” (OECD 2012, p. 9)*

CCC agrees with the OECD recommendations that governments have a vital role to play in this arena and should use a number of policy levers available to them to encourage quality in ECEC (OECD, 2012). In recent years Australia, with the introduction of the National Quality framework including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Framework for School Age Care (FSAC), has made significant progress in *Setting out quality goals and regulations* (Policy Lever 1) and in *Designing and implementing curriculum and standards* (Policy Lever 2). CCC believes that it is essential that Australia build on the progress made in these areas and not weaken the regulatory framework or the assessments and ratings processes in place. CCC believes that the next challenge for Australian governments now is to further strengthen efforts in the area of *Improving qualifications, training, and working conditions* (Policy Lever No 3).

If Australia could start over again, the ideal would be the creation of a publically funded universal system of high quality not for profit, early and middle childhood education and care. As a society we do not question why school is funded and access guaranteed for all.

Addressing availability and affordability issues must not be at the expense of quality. CCC views this Inquiry as an exciting opportunity for governments in Australia to address the current complex funding system to make it simpler for families and services, more equitable and to improve access for low income families, vulnerable children and families, and rural and remote communities.

### ***International Models of ECEC***

CCC believes that while there is merit in looking at international models it must be recognised that any consideration of their application in Australia must take full account of the historical and policy contexts. Although lessons may be learned from examining the models and they may contain points of merit, it is not desirable or possible for Australia to fully adopt any one of these models. CCC urges the Inquiry to ensure that there is rigorous review of any model that is considered for application in Australia. This review must consider the differences in contexts between countries, look at any internal reviews of these systems, their outcomes for children and records of complaints, accidents and incidents.

There has been much commentary about the New Zealand model of home based care. In many ways it is similar to Australia’s existing Family Day Care and In Home Care modes of delivery – it is regulated and includes use of an approved learning framework. The main concern with this system is that the educator in direct care of the children does not need any formal qualification. As (Nutbrown, 2012) discusses for quality care and education to be provided educators working with children need to be trained in the knowledge of childhood development. Educators need training in skills and strategies they can use to support and maximise children’s learning and development.

It is useful to look at countries that are doing well in early childhood education and care- the Nordic countries have been identified as leaders. However there are differences to the Australian context - Nordic societies 'have clear views about childhood, gender equality and the responsibility of the state to support the education of citizens from the cradle to the grave. Their early childhood services are focussed on child development. Access to quality services is guaranteed by law, and participation of parents is encouraged, not least in the area of infant care, where parental leave is remunerated to a level that allows real parental choice' (Bennett 2001).

Nordic countries invest more in early childhood education and care than Australia does. An article on the UNICEF report 'The Children Left Behind' released in November 2010, reveals 'Australia is faring below the average of other developing countries in areas of early childhood development, youth suicide and levels of basic immunisation.....The league table of 27 OECD countries shows that Australia spends one-quarter of the amount that the leading country, Finland, spends on early childhood education....If these problems are not addressed they are going to have an effect on a sustainable social and economic well-being in the future' (UNICEF 2010).

## **2. Demand for and expectations of childcare and early learning services**

### ***Children's development needs***

Research shows that access to high quality childcare and kindergarten has positive effects on any areas of children's development. It is clear though that the emphasis is on HIGH quality. As discussed by (Elliot, 2006) high quality early childhood programs provide rich child focused learning, support improved, social, cognitive and language development in children and provide parents the opportunity to be involved.

Elliot's view is also supported by the Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, (2005), who state that research into high quality early childhood programs confirms,

*'lasting positive effects such as greater school success, higher graduation rates, lower juvenile crime, decreased need for special education services later, and lower adolescent pregnancy rates. Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate better math and language skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships, and better behavioral self-regulation than do children in lower-quality care.'*

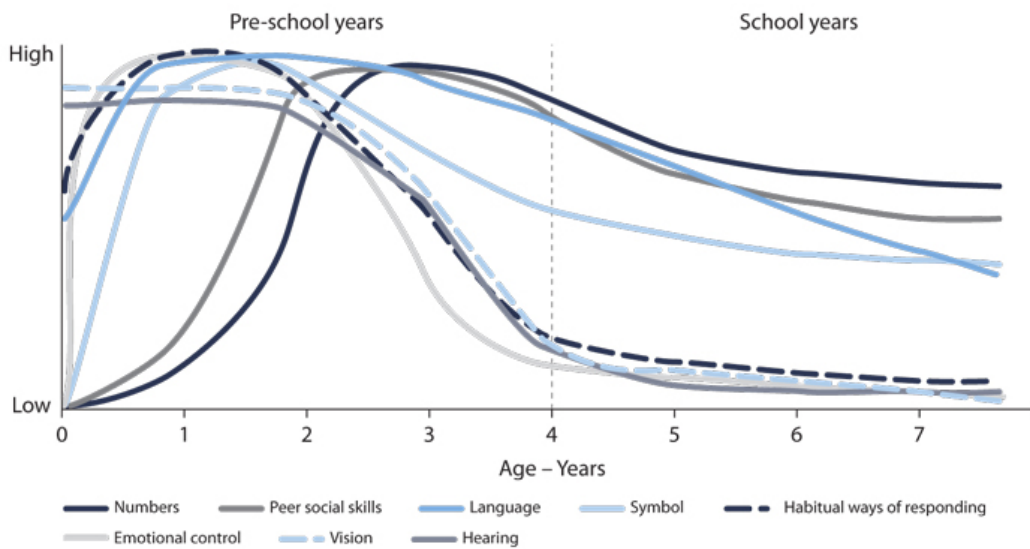
All of this research supports the need for a regulated system in Australia where children have access to highly qualified educators who can support children's needs. As discussed in the Regulation Impact Statement from Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2009, children who are under the care of educators with high levels of qualification will benefit significantly in areas of cognitive and language development.

Current brain research also talks about the impact of high quality care on children's development. Winter (2010) discusses that research in neuroscience shows us that in the first 3 years of a child's life 90% of their brain is developed. Winter goes on to say that the quality of interaction and learning

environments is vital to a babies and toddlers development and that the ‘...impact of early experience has a greater influence on development than heredity.’

This again shows us that we need to continue to have a highly regulated system in place to ensure the best quality care and education is being offered to all children. Part of this is the qualification level of educators working in ECE and the ratios being implemented with all of our children but in particular the under threes.

### Brain Development Graph



<http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/essay-1-aiming-for-high-quality-services/>

The strong evidence on the positive impact of increased staff to child ratios and increased staff qualifications on outcomes for children is summarised in the *Evidence brief on NQF ratios and qualifications* (ECA 2013).

### Benefits of integrated preschool programs

In Victoria, in addition to sessional stand-alone preschools State Government funding has supported the successful delivery of a preschool program (called kindergarten in Victoria) in long day care centres for many years. This funded kindergarten program is delivered by early childhood teachers as part of an integrated education and care service. Increasing numbers of long day care centres are accessing this funding and delivering an integrated preschool program embedded into their daily program and curriculum. Increasingly education and care that includes access to funded kindergarten is being delivered as part of integrated Child and Family Hubs. Since 2009 all funded kindergarten programs have used the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (DEECD, 2009) which shares the same outcomes as the EYLF and FSAC, and includes a strong emphasis on transition to school and collaborative partnerships across all disciplines involved in the education and care of children and support of families.

This model has many benefits for families, including the longer hours facilitating increased workforce participation. Sammon P (2003) as cited in Dowling & O'Malley (2009) outlines that integrated preschool programs provide many benefits for children as well. These include a greater pool and

variety of skilled staff all working together for the development of the children, greater access to knowledge and specialist support, a sole assessment point for childcare and preschool. They also discuss that integrated approaches are often better in ensuring better cognitive progress for children. Elliot (2006), also argues that separate preschool is an inappropriate model for early childhood programs as when we look at young children's development, care and learning cannot be easily separated. In other words, a lot of the learning children do is through care routines.

### **Impacts on family workforce participation**

The accessibility, flexibility, affordability and quality of ECEC and its impact on workforce participation is a complex web of efficiencies and deficiencies. In a (2011) report developed by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in which they challenged a range of leading experts in Early Childhood from around the world to identify a vision for the future of ECEC in Australia, CCC agrees that *'the ECEC service model of the future must address the developmental needs of children at the same time as promoting the workforce participation needs of parents'* (PwC 2011, p. 13).

Achieving this requires thorough understanding and careful consideration of the aspects that support workforce participation. A driving factor for many parents is the quality of care regardless of the accessibility, flexibility and affordability of the service. Parents accessing an ECEC service in Australia should not have to be driven by the question *'would I accept lesser quality care for my child over the cost and flexibility of accessing an ECEC service?'*

Accessing a quality ECEC service is a choice that parents want to make carefully to ensure the best outcomes for their child and for the parent to fully participate in the workforce.

*"If the government wants to increase workforce productivity, they should be enforcing and supporting the quality of childcare offered. When a parent can go to work knowing that their child is in a quality child care centre then they will definitely be able to work more productively in the workplace rather than spending much of the day worrying about what is happening with their child when they are not there. This would help workforce productivity and be good for the economy; people would be able to do their jobs more effectively and productively each day."*

Karyn

Community Child Care advocates for communities working together towards a better future which supports the potential of every child. Home and family are the biggest influence on a child and in the spirit of CCC's vision that families and community are strong, and where community based education and care services are valued and well resourced – quality care supports the collaboration of partnerships between services and families to ensure children have the best opportunities to fully participate in life.

Any notion that it is acceptable to reduce the standards of quality of an ECEC service because home and family are the most significant influence on a child's life is completely out of step with current evidence, which has been presented to this Inquiry by CCC and other organisations. This idea undermines the professionals within the ECEC sector and is disrespectful to aspirations and values

parents have for their child and their expectation that their children are protected, nurtured and educated. Karyn explains her thoughts on this;

*"My expectation of child care is that it would be consistent with the care and learning that happens in our family home. I wouldn't want anything less for William at child care just because we provide a good family and learning environment for him. Also, as we think the carers should be qualified and trained, they would have an expertise that they could bring above what quality Phil and I give William at home. To use an analogy to support this - I am a certified practicing accountant; you might have adequate family budgets and finances in order at home but wish to seek extra expertise from me. It should be expected that I can give you that little bit more than what you are managing well at home, as I am trained and it is my area of expertise."*

The cost of accessing child care is a significant factor for many families can prevent some parents from returning to the workforce. As one parent Tania, who left the workforce when the cost of fulltime care put the family into a weekly deficit explains she was *"more than keen to be part of the workforce and share the financial contributions to the household with her fulltime working partner, however the cost of care following subsidies put us out of pocket each week."* When asked however whether they would accept lower quality care for cheaper child care, she was adamant that this would *'not be acceptable for our child'*.

The cost versus quality debate is serious. Parents want the best for their children and will pay the price whenever they are able to. Cost is a factor but when families have the choice the cost of education and care is not the driving factor in selecting a service.

Phil is adamant that he would *"expect to pay for quality, and potentially a bit more, but that's because I would want all staff qualified and enough staff if not more to adequately ensure that William is kept safe, cared for well, interacted with, is learning and happy in a quality environment."*

*"I would consider looking at services with lower fees, however this does not change my expectation of quality; I would still assess the feeling of the staff, the environment and the care that William is going to get in each centre."*

Karyn

*"I would definitely not be prepared to trade off quality for cheaper fees. Childcare is much more than the title suggests. Angus attending child care is not about being "minded" it is about an educational and social opportunity. It is a chance for him to engage in occupations that are appropriate to his age range and to be guided by experienced professionals to help him develop his independence in these tasks. My son spends a large part of 2 days at childcare, as I was required to return to work and I want to feel confident that during this time he is nurtured and stimulated not just minded. I actually find the idea of this disrespectful to the highly professional work undertaken at the centre and it undermines the quality staff and program of the centre. "*

Kate

There is a real and unacceptable risk that if high quality education care is not universally available and regulated, that families in more vulnerable situations, with less resources or living in lower socio economic areas will only have the option of enrolling their children in lesser quality cheaper services.

Baker (2013, p.13) documents a link between households' relative advantage and education and their reporting of difficulties finding **quality** childcare and notes that

*"This finding points to the need for greater regulation of childcare quality standards to ensure that households with potentially lower expectations or perceptions are not provided with a correspondingly lower quality of care."*

Accessibility, like cost, is also a trade-off for quality that parents do **not** routinely make;

*"I would not be prepared to trade off on quality just to be closer to home. Currently I travel from Bentleigh East to Elwood based on the quality of the service."* Lisa

*"In choosing William's childcare, we narrowed our search down to a choice of two services; one was approximately 1 minute drive from home and the second was about 10 minutes from home (which would have required some back tracking to get to work). Both services had a waiting list however the service further away was able to provide us with a place much earlier than the closer to home service. Our deciding factor was the quality we felt we would get from the service for us and William, so we chose the service closer to home, which also meant waiting longer for a space to become available. The service being close to home was a bonus for Phil and I, but this was not the deciding factor and if we had found the further service more suitable to our needs and wants, we would have done the back tracking to get to work knowing that William was in what we felt was a quality service".* Karyn

### **3. Availability and cost of child care and early learning services**

#### ***How has the sector responded to growth in demand, including changes to types of care offered?***

Integration of services is one of the ways services are responding to changes in family's needs.

*"The integration of services makes life easier and less stressful for [families] by enhancing [their] access to education and care. Improved family engagement, streamlined service delivery and earlier diagnosis of children's health and developmental problems are outcomes of the integrated children's services model."* (DEECD, 2013)

Integrated models of education and care including the provision of sessional kindergarten within a long day care service is becoming a more frequent model of operation as services acknowledge the needs and wants of families. The development of family and child 'hubs' where families can access the services of maternal and child health and other family support services and an ECEC service within one location, continues in communities across Victoria.

Nagambie Preschool and Child Care centre is one example of a service responding to the needs of its local community through increasingly integrated service provision.

*In late 2010 Nagambie Preschool and Child Care centre were successful in their application for a capital grant to undergo works on their existing service - "WE GOT THE GRANT! It's been a long road but now we can extend the preschool and start planning for the future of the kids! I am ecstatic!"*

*In March 2012 the service celebrated the opening of the new hub that provides capacity for 88 children to access education and care in occasional care, three year old and funded four year old kindergarten programmes. Families are also able to access Maternal and Child Health services located on site. The community and key stakeholders in the service involved in the success of the funding and subsequent extension are driven by a desire to meet the needs of the growing Nagambie community. In May 2013 the service extended its hours of operation to meet changing needs of families, and is now exploring further models of care that supports growth and changes in family needs.*

The Victorian Government, through the provision of capital grants is supporting the establishment of high-quality integrated early childhood programs. This further investment in the ECEC sector to provide innovative, flexible and accessible services to children and families will continue to have positive outcomes including

- greater workforce participation of parents through the provision of longer hours of care and education,
- greater work force retention in the ECEC sector as services are able to offer longer hours to staff,
- accessibility for families who have difficulty in accessing services in a multiple locations,
- development of more connected and responsive communities, and
- improved health, well-being and social skills of children through a united approach to the provision of child and family support.

***How well the needs of disadvantaged vulnerable or other additional needs children are being met by the ECEC sector***

Education and care services are a vital source of support to vulnerable children and families and often provide a point of community contact for otherwise isolated families. Early and middle childhood education and care services have the capacity to assist individuals to solve problems, and serve a preventative role. They are one of the few reliable reference points, available in almost every community including the most disadvantaged, and are a place where families come together naturally in a nonstigmatising and equal way, connected across class and cultural boundaries by a shared interest in their children.

In the *TICCSS* survey (ACCS 2013), 83% of Victorian respondent services identified as having vulnerable children at their service. CCC believes that improved staff qualifications and educator: child ratios are of great significance for children experiencing multiple layers of disadvantage. Ensuring access to qualified educators and improved ratios supports the development of meaningful partnerships with vulnerable families and aligns with the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility* whole of government strategy.

As outlined in the ACCS submission to this Inquiry there is still much to be done to improve access for vulnerable families and to increase the capacity of education and care services to support them. Alongside addressing the complexity and inadequacy of current government funding subsidies (such as CCB, CCR, SCB and ISS) a high priority is continuing the journey towards integration of education and care and family support services.



CCC believes that investment in leaders for integrated services is a key element to ensuring education and care services are well placed to assist in identifying, engaging and effectively working with vulnerable children and families. There is a common assumption that co-ordinators of services which make up the mix of child and family services can simply extend their normal role to support the development of new ways of governing, managing and delivering services and engaging the community in an integrated setting. Experience has shown that the skills of leading this kind of fundamental culture change are very different to those required to coordinate a stand-alone education and care service, or a maternal and child health service for example. Further the workload associated with creating new models is significant and cannot be successfully managed on top of the busy and demanding role of co-ordinating components of the service. A specialised integrated services manager position greatly enhances the capacity of specialists within an integrated service to work in an integrated way. Training and funding for these positions is a challenge that still needs to be addressed

#### **4. Government regulation of child care and early learning**

##### **National Quality Framework**

CCC strongly supports the continued implementation of the NQF and believes Victoria's solid progress in implementing the NQF supports this position.

In assessment and ratings results Victoria is performing better than other parts of the country with the community sector in Victoria performing even better again. As documented in the *ACECQA Snapshot Q3 2013*, as at September 30 2013, 77% of assessed services in Victoria, received a rating of Meeting or Exceeding the NQS compared to the national average of 58% of assessed services receiving a rating of Meeting or Exceeding the NQS. Basic analysis of information extracted from the ACECQA Victorian National Register (ACCS, 2013) demonstrates that community based services do better across the board than for-profit commercial services. As at September 30, 2013

- approximately 39% of community based services that have been assessed achieved a rating of Exceeding NQS, compared to just 16% of for-profit services.
- of the long day care centres assessed local government provided long day care services were the most likely to achieve a rating of Exceeding NQS (44% of those assessed) followed by child care co-operatives (36%).
- long day care services that are part of large commercial chains are more likely to be rated as Working towards NQS than small private centres

Further rigorous data analysis by ACECQA would be useful to explore in detail any lessons that can be learned from the performance of the community managed and not for profit services as compared to the commercial sector.

***How ECEC providers are handling the pace of implementation of new staffing ratios and increased staff qualification requirements under the NQF***

Many community managed services in Victoria have been operating at or above the minimum ratios and employing a highly qualified staff team for years. Whilst other community managed services have needed to make adjustments, they have been able to plan for and implement these.

The *TICCSS* survey (ACCS 2013) conducted at the end of 2012 collected data on over 140 services in Victoria, including over 70 long day care centres. It demonstrated that many community based long day care centres in Victoria were not only meeting increased ratio requirements but many were already operating above the minimum educator: child ratios.

- all relevant Victorian respondents were operating at the new minimum standard of 1:4 educator to child ratio for children under 3 years.
- 16% of these services were operating at a 1: 3 ratio, better than the national standard,
- a further 14% of services were planning to increase their staffing in the babies room over the first six months of 2013.
- well ahead of the 2016 NQF schedule, 55% of long day care centre respondents were already operating at 1:11 or better for children over 3 years in 2012
- a further 11% indicated they would move to this ratio by 2013

A survey of 28 community managed long day care centres conducted at the Children's Services Coordinators Seminar in September 2013 found that 96% of respondents were already employing an early childhood teacher, 71% already employed staff who all have a Certificate III level qualification or higher, 82% already employed 50% or more educators who hold a Diploma level qualification or better. Services who do not yet have a fully qualified staff team indicated that they were already employing staff members who will complete further qualifications by the end of the year or are in the process of recruiting now, putting them on track to meet the 2014 qualifications requirements. One service located outside of metropolitan Melbourne indicated that they were having difficulty recruiting for a Diploma qualified position.

Birrlee Child Care Centre is an example of a service who has embraced the NQF reforms and has planned ahead to ensure that they were able to meet improved ratio and qualification requirements.

*Birrlee Child Care Centre is located in a small rural town in South Gippsland, 120 kms from Melbourne CBD. Meeting the improvements in ratio and qualification requirements did require some changes and forward planning, which has put them in a solid position now to meet the NQF. They have been operating at a ratio of one educator to four children for under 3's and 1:10 for over 3's since 2012. All of their educators now have a qualification of Certificate III or better and 50% of their educators have a Diploma level qualification or better. Two staff hold Bachelor level qualifications in early childhood education and they began employing an early childhood teacher at the start of 2014.*

Appendix 2 provides further examples of community managed services who are successfully implementing NQF ratio and qualifications requirements.

***The impact of changes to ratios and qualification requirements on the cost of employing ECEC workers. Whether increased staffing costs have, or will be, passed on in higher fees charged to families***

For the many community managed services that have been operating at above minimum standards for several years, the financial impact of the NQF has been less significant than for the private sector. Some community managed services have needed to make adjustments and these costs have been factored in overtime with any fee increases being partly offset by increases in government subsidies to families.

Birralee Child Care Centre reports that they have needed to pay careful attention to their budgeting process and have increased their fees. The fee rise has not impacted on their utilisation with families accepting that the fee increases have been necessary to ensure the centre which is highly valued in the community remains viable.

*“The centre has a great reputation. Families are really happy with the experience their children have when they come here. They want their children to be happy, well cared for and educated and they know that when they pay fees the money stays in the centre and goes to benefit their children .... They like to know that the people caring for their children have a qualification and many were excited that we were employing an early childhood teacher”*

Claire Director Birrlee Child Care Centre

Flemington Child Care Cooperative is another service that needed to employ extra staff to meet the requirements resulting in a fee increase to families. These increases were implemented progressively from 2009 onwards so that the impact for families was spread over time.

*“Families have already experienced the benefits for their children and have been really supportive. The impact of fee increases has been offset to a degree by the increased Child Care Rebate that families are eligible for. Our centre has experienced no issues with viability and we have maintained utilisation rates. The government set out to improve things for children and its working”.*

Daniela, Director Flemington Child Care Cooperative

The table below shows data on long day care fees as indicated by respondents from Victoria, to the TICCSS surveys.

<b>Table 1: Average daily fee for LDC</b>		
	May/June 2012	Nov/Oct 2012
Victoria	\$80.44	\$82.87
Victoria Metropolitan <sup>1</sup>	\$83.84	\$86.49
Victorian Regional	\$71.64	\$70.46
National	\$75.32	\$81.91

<sup>1</sup> This is calculated using the ABS ASGC Remoteness Classification, metropolitan being areas classified as major cities (Melbourne and Geelong) and regional being the rest of Victoria.

Only half of the Victorian respondents to the *TICCSS* survey indicated they had increased their fees in 6 months prior to the survey. Of these 47% stated that their families did not express frustration, reduce hours, leave the service or say they were experiencing financial stress.

Community managed services outside of the metropolitan area of Melbourne do sometimes point to difficulties because they are limited in how much they can increase fees by due to the ability of families in their area to pay additional costs.

CCC views higher differential federal government subsidy rates and further employment incentives for early and middle childhood educators outside of metropolitan areas and in other hard to staff areas as a high priority.

### **Outside School Hours Care and the National Quality Framework**

The Outside School Hours Care sector has grown significantly throughout Australia over the past seven years. In 2004 there were 4964 services, 2009 increased to 7,410 and in 2012, there were 8413 services.

The number of children and families that access OSHC has increased dramatically over the last seven years.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
<b>Children</b>	235,550	241,420	239,990	237,960	258,880	253,760	267,530	292,810	315,220
<b>Families</b>	164,330	169,390	169,510	169,100	184,520	181,580	191,970	210,190	225,780

Child Care in Australia Report, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, August 2013

In Victoria, we have also seen continued growth in the sector with currently over 1200 OSHC services.

The rapid growth in before and after school care is a direct result of demand from families who need care for their children prior to commencement and at conclusion of the school day; to be able to work, study etc. Demand for Vacation Care has also increased as Victoria has eleven weeks of school holidays per year and working parents don't have sufficient leave entitlements to cover this. A main consideration for families when needing to access a before and after school care service is the location. Families need a service that is located on school grounds or is in close vicinity to the school the child is attending for safety and logistical reasons of getting the child to and from school and the OSHC service.

Increasingly families looking for a school for their child are being driven to make a choice dependant on the school having a before and after school care service onsite. Increasingly schools are realising they need a before and after school care service as it can be the deciding factor for families when choosing between two schools.

Prior to July 2003, the OSHC sector in Victoria only had National Standards which were guidelines that were not monitored and were left up to individual services to ensure they followed them. CCC

saw many services not operate within these National Standards often not because they didn't want to but because they didn't know about them. These standards were not monitored by government and therefore not taken seriously by many in the sector.

In July 2003 Quality Assurance was implemented which resulted in the OSHC sector having a system which was monitored by an external body, National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) which provided the OSHC sector with:

- Guidelines to follow which provided services with direction;
- Better outcomes for children and families;
- Aspirations to continue to improve;
- Acknowledgement that OSHC was not a babysitting service but was providing children with education and care;
- Provided status to professionals who were working in the sector and acknowledgement for the work they were doing with children and families;
- More people became qualified as they could see a future in the industry as OSHC was being taken seriously and respected in the same space and profession as Long Day Care.

In May 2009, Victorian OSHC services came under the Victorian Regulations for Childrens Services which provided the OSHC sector with another level of recognition, and for the children and families who were using these services, some reassurance that there were minimum standards that were being monitored by State Government. This progression has resulted in many positive outcomes for OSHC services including

- Guidelines for service operators
- Operating within the same regulatory framework as Long Day Care so clear expectations on what government and society expect as minimum standards for all Victorian children aged 0 - 12 years.
- Higher recognition of the OSHC sector within communities and government
- More professionals choosing OSHC as a career
- Government engagement with the OSHC sector, listening to their needs and issues and providing resources, scholarships and directing funding to support and resource OSHC sector

The National Quality Framework implemented in 2012 and the Framework for School Age Care, My Time Our Place are both lifting the standard of what is expected for children in Australian school age care services. CCC fully supports the ongoing inclusion of OSHC in the full scope of the NQF. The community owned OSHC sector in Victoria has embraced the system and recognise that it has positive outcomes for children, families, professionals and for the sector as a whole. Most of all, the ongoing inclusion of OSHC in the NQF will continue to provide a regulatory framework that will ensure children are safe and protected from hazards and harm. It will ensure that children are in an environment that provides a quality recreational program that takes a holistic informal approach to their education and care needs, that is different to and complements their experience of structured formal learning in the school setting. Ongoing inclusion of OSHC in the full scope of the NQF will provide families with assurance that all OSHC services are monitored under the same framework regardless of which service their child attends.

If the government weakens the regulatory framework or quality assurance process for OSHC, it sends a message that children in the 5 – 12 years age group are not as important as our younger children. This cohort of children need the government to ensure that there are strong systems in place to ensure their safety and well-being.

Appendix 3 contains stories and quotes from a sample of OSHC community owned services outlining their progress towards implementing the National Quality Framework and some of the resulting benefits.

### ***Workforce issues and the effect of the NQF***

Victorian data from the *TICCSS* survey (ACCS 2013) indicates that recruitment of qualified staff continues to be a challenge for services particularly for degree and diploma level positions. Of the 37% of respondent services who at the time of the survey had recently recruited, 63% found the field of applicants that had applied unsatisfactory. 86% of these respondent services, were however satisfied with the successful educator's suitability and qualifications for the role. Over 120 Victorian services provided a portfolio of their educators' current qualifications representing close to 1700 educators. Of these 22% were actively working towards a qualification, a positive indicator for future availability of qualified educators in Victoria.

As indicated by the examples in Appendix 2, the community managed sector is tracking well with meeting the NQF qualification requirements, despite recruitment being an ongoing challenge.

### **Initiatives of governments to address workforce shortages and qualifications**

In 2009, the Victorian State Government put in place a comprehensive workforce strategy *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce* (DEECD) which has included an Early Childhood Qualifications Fund, Early Childhood Scholarships for Aboriginal people and Employment Incentives for Early Childhood Educators. Since 2007, the Victorian Government has awarded more than 2,200 scholarships to early childhood educators to attain or upgrade early childhood education qualifications – including degree, diploma and certificate III level qualifications. The availability of this strategy has made a significant contribution to addressing the workforce needs in Victoria.

As part of their future planning to meet the NQF requirements Birrale Child Care Centre supported a staff member to access state government support to study for a Bachelor degree. Ebony Knox who first started work at the centre as a junior helping out with domestic duties in 2005, received a Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) scholarship, completed her Bachelor degree and commenced work as the early childhood teacher at Birrale at the beginning of this 2014. This support enabled her to remain in her local community (Korumburra) and follow a professional pathway. (See Appendix 4 for more detail on Ebony's professional journey)

*"Without the scholarship and encouragement of my workplace I would not have even considered doing it (the Bachelor degree). The extra money gave me the reassurance I needed to know that I could cover the expenses that were involved – being able to buy books, pay for travel expenses and time off work to do placements made it possible for me to take on this next step. I wouldn't have taken the financial risk without it"*

*“When I look back to the person I was before I did the Bachelor I think how much I have changed – I have a new knowledge base and many new ways of working. The scholarship has helped set me up as a professional”*

*Ebony Knox Early Childhood Teacher Birralee Child Care Centre Korumburra*

***The extent to which training/childcare courses enable workers to meet the requirements of the NQF and how training could be improved***

CCC receives constant feedback from services about problems with private RTOs that impact on the performance of graduates, including

- failure to equip students undertaking Certificate III and Diploma level qualifications with even a basic understanding of the EYLF (that has been in use since 2009) and FSAC (that has been in use since 2011) and failure to provide current information about the NQF and NQS
- inadequate work placement hours
- fast tracking of qualifications

Part of the problem was that the training package was not updated to reflect the new frameworks until recently. CCC consistently heard from services that although trainers in TAFE and other high quality settings made sure that information about the reforms was included in students learning many private providers did not. In June 2013, the National Skills Standards Council approved a new training package for childhood education and care qualifications. CCC is pleased to see some important changes lobbied for in this new package including

- the use of language consistent with the NQF.
- the introduction of core units such as, CHCECE009 Using an approved learning framework to guide practice and CHCECE001 Develop cultural competence
- assessment criteria have been rewritten to include minimum hours to demonstrate skills in the workplace. Certificate III students will now need to spend 120 hours in one or more registered children’s services to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on the job, and Diploma students 240 hours.

The new approved training packages have increased significantly and now align more closely with the knowledge and practical skill needed in providing quality education and care. The next challenge is ensuring that funding available supports the delivery of this training package.

***Workforce and workplace issues that affect the attractiveness of child care or early learning as a vocation***

Victorian data from the second wave *TICCSS Report* shows that recruitment is a significant issue.

- Two thirds of respondent services (66%) had recruited for an educator position in the six months prior to TICCSS. The majority of those recruits had been for Cert III level at 44%, followed by Diploma level at 32%, with degree at 8% and Director/Coordinator at 1%.
- The more qualified the position the more difficult the recruiting. Sixty-nine per cent of services found it very difficult to recruit for a director/coordinator while 14% found it sometimes difficult. Seventy-two per cent found it very difficult to recruit for a degree level position and 59% for a diploma level.

- The top factors that make recruitment difficult were applicants not being suitably qualified or skilled (68%) and the low wages (65%).

Pay and conditions for the early and middle childhood workforce are lower compared with other education sectors and CCC believes that issues with recruitment are a product of an under-valued and under-remunerated workforce. CCC believes that the Australian government must acknowledge their role in ongoing, direct, universal and equitable investment in funding wages in early and middle childhood education and care services.

Professional recognition is also an important factor impacting on the attractiveness of working in education and care services. Over the last few years CCC has observed significant positive effects from the increased professional recognition of the early and middle childhood workforce. This impact has had ground-breaking impacts on both the morale and sense of professional identity of staff and the attitude of families and the broader community. The change in language that is embedded in the NQF such as use of the term “educators”, is an important element of improving the professional status of the people working in the education and care sector. Bridging the education and care policy divide has been an important step for Australia. Choice of language is powerful and CCC believes that the terminology relating to early [and middle] childhood education and care should be used consistently.

Access to ongoing quality innovative professional development opportunities is an important element of attracting and retaining a thriving professional workforce. The role of the Professional Support Coordinator in each state and territory continues to be vital in ensuring subsidised access to professional support learning opportunities. The data gathered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave *TICCSS survey* suggests the workforce is embracing opportunities to upskill and to participate in on and off site professional development. CCC supports ongoing Australian government funding of the Professional Support Coordinators (or similar). CCC believes that it is essential that there is a high degree of quality control to ensure currency and relevance of any professional support that is subsidised by public funds.

#### **1. Government support for childcare and early learning**

In addition to recommendations in the ACCS submission CCC offers the following comment regarding the provision of Outside School Hours care services.

#### **Model of funding for schools to resource and support the operation and management of an OSHC service**

CCC supports the development of a funding model that supports every school to operate and manage an OSHC service. Funding would be directed toward the management of services to enable a school to employ a senior manager or place a current senior staff member (e.g. Vice Principal) in the role of leadership and management of the service. This person would also act as the liaison between the school and the OSHC service. Children and families accessing an OSHC service on the same grounds as the school they attend should see a unified approach to the care and education of children – not a school and onsite service operating in silos. The benefits of a funded structure that enables schools to operate and manage an OSHC service are:



- One management model for delivery of school and OSHC service; with a unified vision and philosophy in both services, families on choosing a school would be reassured that the OSHC service would operate within the parameters of school management with no potential for outsourcing to a for profit company;
- Reinvestment in the provision of care and education for all children - surplus that is generated in the OSHC service is circulated back into the school and/or OSHC service and therefore parents fees are reinvested into provisions for their children;
- Closer collaboration between the school and the OSHC service would support greater investment in better outcomes for children, providing a holistic approach to the development of children as active citizens of their community;
- Greater employment benefits - Staff could work across both school and OSHC service (would create positions that have more hours);

If each school was able to access additional funding to manage and operate the OSHC service on site it would eliminate the need for discussion of an extended school day.

#### **Additional resources for OSHC sector required**

Further resources for the implementation and success of the NQF for the OSHC sector is needed and should be delivered in different ways to ensure it caters for the unique workforce of the OSHC sector.

In respect of the unique workforce structure of OSHC, ongoing and sustainable professional development is a must. The workforce is heavily reliant on casual and part time employees made up of university students and people who have another job due to the limited number of available working hours in OSHC.

We suggest online professional development tools and training resources that make provisions for a cyclic process of professional development amongst individual service and sector wide staff teams. The delivery methods of a 'train the trainer' PD where one person is trained up and can then go on to train others is one example.

## **Appendix 1      Recommendations to the Productivity Commission Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Inquiry**

**CCC supports the following recommendations to the Inquiry by Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS)**

### **1. Children's best interest principle**

- Use children's best interests as the first principle and underpinning rationale for all deliberations and recommendations to the Australian Government.

### **2. Continued implementation of the National Quality Framework**

- Continued implementation to 2020 and review of the NQF as planned.
- Change the assessment and ratings cycle so that a service with a rating of Working Towards the NQS has the option of being reassessed just in the standard/s that they did not receive Meeting or Exceeding the NQS for, as soon as they have implemented changes and their self-assessment process indicates that they are now Meeting the NQS in that Standard.
- Put on hold the Excellent Rating at least until all services have been through the assessment and ratings process and direct resources saved by doing this to increasing the pace of assessment and ratings visits.
- Increase the number of unannounced visits to services by Regulatory Authorities to monitor continuity of practices.
- Bring all service types including in-home care, limited hours care, occasional care, mobile services and MACS into the scope of the NQF.
- Regulation and full participation in the NQF for any new delivery models that attract government subsidies.
- Further resource services to ensure that there is a one stop reference point (ACECQA or each Regulatory Authority) for information about the broad range of legislative requirements that services need to meet. This could include for example
  - Updating the National Framework Resource Kit to include
    - clear outlines of what each required policy needs to cover
    - listing all other federal and State based legislative requirements in each policy area
  - Regular update alerts and explanatory notes to all services when any federal or state legislative requirement changes across any of the required policy areas and the implications of this for services
- Collation and analysis of data by ACECQA about the assessment and ratings performance of community managed and not-for-profit services as compared to privately owned commercial services and that this information be used to inform the Productivity Commission's recommendations.
- Further improvements to the educator: child ratios for children under 12 months to 1:3.
- Bring forward the timeline for implementation of the 1:11 ratio for children over 3 years, from 2016 to 2015.

### **3. Affordability and funding models**

- An increase to the current level of Australian Government funding with consideration being given to redirecting some funds from the proposed new Paid Parental Leave scheme.

- Establishing a nationally consistent system for state and federal investment in all early and middle childhood education and care services in scope of the NQF including long day care, outside school hours care, occasional care, limited hours care, family day care, in-home care, preschools and kindergartens to ensure affordability of children's services.
- The creation of one simple consolidated payment system which is paid directly to services which achieves the goal of rolling the investment of the CCR into the current CCB, as recommended by the Henry Tax Review.
- Developing the new combined payment to be delivered by one agency and to be accessible and transparent for families and services.
- Increasing the Australian Government subsidies to 90% of the **full** costs of child care for low income families.
- Increasing the Australian Government subsidies to 100% of the **full** costs of child care for children known to the child protection system, and other at risk or vulnerable children and development of mechanisms that do not depend on regular reapplication processes.
- The provision for additional inclusion support funding to be included in this single streamlined payment.
- Expansion of inclusion support funding to include meeting children's medical needs.
- Higher differential Australian Government subsidy rates for children's services located in areas of vulnerability as defined by SEIFA.
- Higher differential Australian Government subsidy rates for rural and remote communities.

#### 4. Availability

- Reintroduction of state/territory planning committees, supported by limiting access to CCB to stop unplanned and rampant growth in areas of oversupply.
- Further investment in early and middle years planning to support local governments and local communities undertake needs analysis and develop and implement models of service delivery that meets community needs. Local governments can provide a key role in the identification of potential sites.
- The Australian Government make available capital grants or no/low interest loans for not-for-profit services in targeted locations (including rural and remote areas and areas with high unmet demand), to build, extend or remodel children's services to meet local needs

#### 5. Flexibility

- Exploration of workplace flexibility strategies and promotion of these to employers, including re-establishment of the Australian Government's Work and Family Unit or similar to support this.
- Incentives to encourage large employers to provide or partner with existing early and middle childhood education and care service providers for work-based children's services.
- Eligibility to CCB and CCR (or any new government funding structure) **not** be extended to include informal care.
- Provision of **additional** government funding for the extensions to existing programmes or any new models introduced to ensure that there are no reductions in funding to existing programmes.

#### **6. Improved access to education and care for vulnerable families and children**

In addition to the recommendations already outlined in the previous sections on **Full Implementation of the NQF** and **Affordability and Funding Models**, ACCS recommends

- Funding of innovative place based projects that
  - Take a holistic approach to improving access for vulnerable and at risk families and
  - Increase the capacity of early and middle childhood education and care services and local community and family support agencies to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and families.

#### **7. Greater investment in funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services**

- Implementation of a 10 year plan for integrated child and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families as outlined by SNAICC in their proposal *Early Years Pathways – positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children* and in *Joining the Dots, Program and Funding Options for Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's services* (Brennan, 2013).
- Increase the capacity of early and middle childhood education and care services and local community and family support agencies to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and families.

#### **8. Greater investment in the education and care workforce**

- Funding of any pay increases that flow from the Application for an Equal Remuneration Order.
- Ongoing direct investment in funding wages in early and middle childhood education and care services – investment that unlike the Early Years Quality Fund is universal and does not involve onerous and inequitable application processes and that is not limited to long day care only.
- Increased delivery of workforce initiatives designed to attract and retain new educators and teachers to the sector and to support educators working in education and care services to upgrade their qualifications, including a HECS / HELP exemption for early childhood teachers.

## **Appendix 2      Ratio and qualification profiles of community managed centres**

### **Brenbeal Children's Centre**

For over twelve months this service's ratios have been one educator to four children under three and one educator to ten children over three. All of their staff hold a Certificate III level qualification or higher, 50% of these already hold a Diploma or higher and they began employing an early childhood teacher in 2009.

### **Poets Grove Family and Children's Centre**

This centre is currently operating with one educator to 3 children under three, 1:4 for children over 3 and 1:8 or better in their sessional kindergarten group. They have been using these ratios for six years. All of their staff hold a certificate 111 or better and 50% of educators hold a Diploma qualification or better. They have also employed early childhood teacher for the past six years.

### **Wimble Street Child Care Co-op**

This service operates with the ratio of 1:4 for children under 3 and 1:10 for children over 3, they have been operating at these ratios for 3 years. All of their educators hold a Certificate III qualification, or higher except for one who has nearly completed this qualification. 50% of educators hold a Diploma or better and they have employed an early childhood teacher since 2000.

### **Birralee Child Care Centre**

This service has been operating at a ratio of one educator to four children for under 3's and 1:10 for over 3's since 2012. All their educators have a qualification of Certificate III or better and 50% of their educators have a Diploma level qualification. Two staff hold a Bachelor degree in early childhood education and they began employing an early childhood teacher at the start of 2014

### **Monash Children's Centre   Clayton**

This centre has been operation at a ratio of 1:3 for children under 3 and 1:8 for children over 3 for around 5 years. All educators hold a certificate III or better, 85% of educators hold a Diploma or higher. They have employed an early childhood teacher since 1998 and currently have 3 early childhood teachers on staff.

### **Flemington Child Care Co-op**

This centre's current ratios are 1:3 for children under 3 and 1:8 for children over three, which they have been operating with for the past year. All educators hold a certificate III or better, 50% hold a Diploma or higher and they have employed an early childhood teacher since 2012.

### **Acacia Fitzroy Creche**

This centre has been operating at a ratio of 1:3 for children under 3 and 1:10 for children over 3 for 2 years. All educators hold a certificate III or better, 50% hold a Diploma or higher and they have employed two early childhood teachers since 2006.

### **Greythorn Early Childhood Centre**

This service is operating with the ratios of 1:4 for children under 3 and 1:10 for children over 3. Their staff all hold a certificate III or higher, 50% have a Diploma level qualification or higher and they began employing an early childhood teacher in 2012.

### **Alpha Children's Centre**

In 2011 this centre started following the ratios of one educator to every four children under three and one educator to every eight or nine children over three. They have been employing an early childhood teacher for over 10 years. All of their staff hold a Certificate III qualification or higher and 50% of these hold a Diploma or higher qualification.

### **Clarendon Children's Centre**

This centre has followed the ratios of three educators to eleven children under three and three educators to seventeen children over three since around 2000. All educators hold a minimum qualification of a Certificate III and 75% of these educators hold a Diploma or higher qualification. They now employ two early childhood teachers.

### **South Melbourne Child Care Co-op**

The ratios for this service are one educator to three children under three, one educator to five children over three and one educator to seven children over four. They have operated at these ratios since 1995. 75% of staff at this service hold a Diploma level qualification or higher and the remaining 25% already hold a Certificate III and are working towards Diploma level. They have employed an early childhood teacher since approximately 1990.

### **Swinburne Prahran Community Children's Centre Co-op**

This service has been operating at a ratio of one educator to four children under three since 2012 and one educator to eight children over three since 2005. All educators hold a certificate III or better, 50% hold a Diploma or higher and they have employed an early childhood teacher since 2001.

### **Cockatoo Community Child Care**

This service began using the ratios of one educator to four children under three and one educator to ten children over three in 2012. All educators hold a Certificate III level qualification or higher, except for one who is currently completing this qualification. More than 50% of educators hold a Diploma level qualification or higher, and they have employed an early childhood teacher since 2000.

### **Saltwater Child Care Centre**

This centre operates at a ratio of one educator to 4 children under 3 and a ratio of 1:13 for the over 3's. All permanent staff have a Certificate III level qualification or higher with 95% of staff holding a Diploma level or higher. They have employed an early childhood teacher for over 20 years.

### **Beechworth Community Child Care Centre**

Beechworth Community Child Care Centre operates with one educator to four children under 3 years and 1:15 for children over 3 years. All of their educators have a Certificate III level qualification or higher except for one educator who has met the grandfathering requirements of Victorian Regulations. This service has no difficulties meeting the requirement that 50% of educators working with the children have or are actively working towards a Diploma level qualification or higher. They employ 1 fulltime and 4 part time educators with a Diploma level qualification and in addition to this 3 of their staff who have a Certificate III are studying for their Diploma. They employ an early childhood teacher with a Bachelor level qualification.

### **Clifton Child Care Cooperative**

Clifton Child Care Cooperative is a 27 place parent managed service that operates at a ratio of 1:4 or above for children under 3 years and a ratio of 1:7 for children over 3 years. All staff members employed at the service have a Certificate III level qualification or higher. With 3 full time educators holding a Diploma level of qualification or higher and 2 staff with a Bachelor level qualification in early childhood the service has no difficulties meeting the qualification and educator: child ratio requirements of the NQF.

### **Eltham Child Care Cooperative**

This service operates at a ratio of one educator to three children under three years and a ratio of 1:10 or above for children over 3 years. All staff have a Certificate III level qualification or better except for a trainee who is employed in addition to the service's usual educator: child ratios. The majority of staff have a Diploma level qualification, and the centre has employed an early childhood teacher for at least 10 years.

### **Brandon Park Children's Centre**

Since the start of 2012 Brandon Park Children's Centre has been operating at a ratio of one educator to 3 children for the under 3's and 1:8 or above for children over 3 years. They employ an early childhood teacher. Except for 2 educators who have a Certificate III level qualification, all the rest of their educators have a Diploma level qualification.

### **Appendix 3 Case Studies - Outside School Hours Care and the NQF**

#### **Cambridge Primary School OSHC**

Cambridge Primary School OSHC is in Hoppers Crossing a growth area on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne with 60 Before School Places, 120 After School Places and 75 Vacation Care places

There are 10 educators that enthusiastically operate over ratio to cover any eventuality and to meet the needs of children and families where required and to enrich their planning. One educator has Advanced Diploma in Children's service, three educators have Diploma in OSHC, two educators have Certificate III and are studying for their Diploma in OSHC and one educator is studying teaching.

The service has embraced the NQF and has noticed that the positivity in the service recognises that all educators are on the same page and has had increased enthusiasm for the education and care that they provide for children. The morale in the service operates at an elevated level with increased levels of professionalism and commitment and educators share duties with a sound sense of purpose. Through the NQF and NQS positive changes have come about and the program runs more smoothly, is more organised and educators assist each other more. This service has an Exceeding NQS rating.

Coordinator Cathy Lucifero has said *'that their efforts to try new things and the recognition of their collaborative practice has been validated by their assessment and rating visit'...*

*'Having the NQS has helped Educators in better planning for Children. It has enabled us to further enhance our abilities to develop a program for Children and their learning. It has helped Educators with understanding better ways of observations, more thorough and detailed planning and better relationships with children and families' - Margo Braica, Educator*

*As an educator in the sector I'm thankful that the NQS was introduced as it has given our sector a purpose and a goal/incentive for everyone involved. But on personal level, I'm thankful that it happened as it has enabled me to grow personally and professionally where I have expanded my knowledge and one where I can continue to do this". Peter Osmond, Assistant Coordinator*

#### **Birmingham Primary School OSHC**

This service operates at a 1:15 ratio, and of the staff employed 40% hold a Diploma, 20% hold a cert III or IV, 30% are enrolled in either certificate or diploma courses in children's services and are yet to complete, and 10% have no relevant qualification.

*"It will be great for all children in the childcare sector to have consistent care across the board. Also as a parent, knowing that my children have qualified staff looking after them who have studied and understand the child as a whole and offering programs for the individual children's needs is rewarding" - Nicole Gordon, Birmingham Primary School OSHC Service.*



### **North Fitzroy OSHC**

North Fitzroy OSHC service operates a 220 place after school care and a 60 place before school care service. Although the legal ratio requirement is 1:15, the service often provides a 1:10 ratio. The service employs 18 individual staff members on a rotating roster. 4 staff have completed minimum qualifications, 1 staff member completed a Diploma, and the Coordinator holds a degree in an approved related field. 14 staff are enrolled and attending either certificate or diploma studies and are yet to complete these.

### **Oakleigh Primary School OSHC**

*"On our school site we have an OSHC Program and Kindergarten. We recently went through our assessment and rating visit and received "Working Towards". We need to address the following areas - Educational Program Element 1 and Practice Element 7 Leadership and Service Management. Initially we were disappointed but the assessment provided an opportunity for us to reflect on our current educational practices in collaboration with the Kindergarten and the School. We have just had our first professional development session with all Kindergarten and OSHC service educators and are developing a combined philosophy. The NQS has provided us with guidelines and guidance on what we need to be working on and has provided us with levels for us to aspire to. We finally feel like we are on the same page and working together which is only going to be positive for us all but most importantly for our children and families".* Liz Crowe – Oakleigh Primary School OSHC Coordinator

### **The City of Greater Geelong School Holiday Program**

The City of Greater Geelong School Holiday Program has had two of their service sites assessed under the NQF, with one service meeting the standard and one exceeding the standard. The service is approved to offer 270 places. The Service operates at a 1:15 ratio when their activities are based on site, 1:12 routine outing, 1:10 for excursion, 1:8 high risk excursions such as horse riding, outdoor orienteering etc., and 1:5 for water based experiences.

Staff qualification breakdown is as follows: 2.4% of staff are qualified Early Childhood Teachers, 45.6% of staff are qualified Primary school teachers, 8.8% of staff are qualified Secondary school teachers, 2.2% of staff are studying Bach. Early Childhood, 13.7% of staff are studying Primary School Teachers, 2.2% of staff are qualified social worker/psychologist, 6.8% of staff are studying social work/psychology, 13.7% of staff hold their Diploma of Children's Services, and 4.6% of staff hold their Cert III in Children's Services.

*"The NQF is positive for children and families because it promotes family centred practices supporting and promoting open two way communication between parents and Educators and ensuring a sense of partnership in the care and education of each child. The NQS sets a standard of best practice, rating and assessment across the country allowing parents to have the consistency of safety standards, staff ratios and expectations from state to state and service to service."* – Kaleena Pont, City of Greater Geelong

*Learning is recognised as a life long journey that continues to develop and grow and can take many varied forms throughout our life, from early forms of communicating needs as an infant, to making friendships, to academic achievements throughout school and beyond; and teaching is recognised as*

*a collaborative partnership between parents, Educators and children, ensuring all stakeholders are equally involved. The frameworks embedded into the standard ensure all children are recognised and valued for who they are at any given time, their individual cultures and that they are nurtured and encouraged along whatever path they wish to see their full potential” – Kaleena Pont, City of Greater Geelong*

### **The Grange Community Centre**

The Grange Community Centre is a 55 place service in Wyndham in Melbourne with a high percentage of vulnerable families attending. (The centre also operates a 3year old kindergarten and an occasional care service). There are 3 educators in the OSHC service; 2 educators have the Advanced Diploma in Children’s Services (one of these educators has a Certificate 4 in Workplace Training & Assessment,) the 3<sup>rd</sup> Educator has Certificate 3 and is currently studying for the Diploma in OSHC. The service believes that through their implementation of the Framework for School Age Care and aiming to meet the NQS it has enhanced their relationships with children and families and has developed an improved rapport with their children. The educational leader Helen spoke about families appreciating the way that they can bring their differences and issues to them and how educators listen to their concerns to support them or bring about change. This has supported many vulnerable families to link with other agencies for further assistance and support particularly for children that have demonstrated behavioural issues.

As a community centre service and not located in a school the families are also appreciative of educators being involved in their community to support them and their children with educators attending community events such as concerts. With the help of their QIP as a useful guiding tool this has had a positive change in culture amongst the educators as they have looked much deeper into reflective practice in the service. This service has recently submitted their QIP.

### **St Peter’s Epping OSHC**

St Peter’s Epping OSHC service, 22kms North of Melbourne operates a 30 place Before School and 45 After School place service and employs 6 employees to run the service. One educator has an Advanced Diploma in Children’s Services, two educators have a Diploma in OSHC and one Educator has a Certificate 3 in Children Services.

This service sometimes operates over ratio to cover planning or other events as needed. They acknowledge that the QIP supports and shares what they are doing and encourages and supports them to ask questions of each other. Even though they had made continued improvements under Quality Assurance they recognise through the NQS that reflective practice has assisted them to value someone else’s perspective. This has increased their practising professional responsibilities which have helped them to increase enjoyment of school age care. This has been positive for educators to work together as a team and through this introduction they practice much deeper observation of their work and of the children in their service .They look at things differently under the NQF and NQS and have an improved understanding of planning for a child which incorporates collaborative practice.

This is demonstrated and shared with educators and families through their mind maps to where they are at, where they are heading and where they might head to from there.

Parents have an increased understanding of the program and the NQF through the newsletter which unpacks the learning in the service and the value of positive relationships with families.

The service explores innovative ways to maintain and sustain connections with families and community and have found social media as a tool particularly useful to communicate with. This service has a provisional rating at present.

#### **Appendix 4 Case Studies – Outcome from Victorian State Government Scholarship**

Ebony Knox started work as a junior helping out with domestic duties at **Birralee Child Care Centre** when she was still at high school in 2005. Shortly after completing high school she was offered a position as an assistant at the centre and encouraged to study. With the support of her workplace she went on to complete a Certificate III and Diploma level qualification. As the centre started planning to meet the early childhood teacher qualification requirements the Director discussed with her the possibility of completing a Bachelor. The availability of a Victorian State Government scholarship meant this was a real option for her.

*“Without the scholarship and encouragement of my workplace I would not have even considered doing it. The extra money gave me the reassurance I needed to know that I could cover the expenses that were involved – being able to buy books, pay for travel expenses and time off work to do placements made it possible for me to take on this next step. I wouldn’t have taken the financial risk without it”*

Ebony completed her Bachelor and is now employed as an early childhood teacher at Birralee. She found the study opened her eyes to new ways of working and helped her gain a much more in depth understanding of the EYLF. It gave her a completely different perspective and approach with supporting children and guiding children’s behaviour. She has loved being able to use her increased knowledge and skills as part of the team at Birralee. This process has enabled her to remain in her own community and still follow a professional pathway. The contacts and networks she has the community are strong and have been maintained at the same time as she has developed new ones through her study.

*“When I look back to the person I was before I did the Bachelor I think how much I have changed – I have a new knowledge base and many new ways of working. The scholarship has helped set me up as a professional”*

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