

12 December, 2018

Re: The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry into the status of the teaching profession

To whom it may concern,

Gowrie SA wishes to submit the following in relation to the Inquiry. Please note we will be responding from the perspective of considering early childhood teachers (4 year degree) working with children 0-6 years in child care centres or integrated preschool and child care sites. As with the school and preschool sectors, the child care sector is experiencing high turnover of teachers, struggling to recruit and retain teachers and unable to offer a career structure for early childhood teachers. We will also be referencing the South Australian School and Preschool Education Staff Enterprise Agreement (SAPSEEA), under which most South Australian early childhood teachers in government and independent preschools and schools are paid.

1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.

Currently most early childhood teachers working in the long day care sector are not paid under the SAPSEEA. They are paid under the hybrid modern Award, resulting in significantly less income. They also generally do not have the same working conditions as teachers, or status.

Income: Under the SAPSEEA, an early childhood teacher salary is based on years of experience and ranges from \$36.03 to \$52.25 per hour (9 levels). Under the Modern Award, an early childhood teacher salary ranges from \$26.23 to \$36.30 per hour (12 levels). After 12 years a highly experienced teacher paid under the Modern Award is paid at the rate of a graduate which demonstrates the impossibility of creating a career structure for teachers in child care.

Conditions: Annual leave provisions under the SAPSEEA include shorter working days (7.25 hours) and increased annual leave provisions of 12 weeks. Under the Modern Award, working days are usually 8 hours and annual leave provisions are 4 weeks.

Status: It is well known that Government preschool and school teachers hold a higher status within the community than early childhood teachers in child care. This is evident in the way politicians and media disparagingly question the need for early childhood teacher qualifications and quality provisions, despite the established body of research evidence to the contrary, which has demonstrated superior outcomes for children's learning and wellbeing in the period birth to six when qualified teachers are their educators. Such conversations about whether children in child care require qualified early childhood teachers does not occur in relation to preschool and school teachers which are institutionally enshrined as holding a professional level status within the national/international community. Additionally there has not been a strong focus on early childhood leadership and career progression which also impacts on the status of and opportunities available to early childhood teachers.

Schools and early childhood services are based on an outmoded model which has changed minimally over the past decades. However, there has been increasing social and technological change which places additional expectations of complexity for teachers in educating children of all ages. For example early childhood teachers, the majority of whom are graduates, are being given unrealistic roles as the educational leader of their service in addition to their teaching duties: burnout and loss of teachers to other careers is the result.

There needs to be more non-contact time for teachers to participate in collaborative professional learning which is fundamental to quality education, job satisfaction and motivation.

New models of leadership are needed in order to build career structures and leadership opportunities throughout an educational service in order to share the administrative, managerial and leadership responsibilities. Enhanced opportunities for leadership would offer career progression and improve teacher commitment.

2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.

Currently it is up to individual early childhood services as to the support platforms that are provided. These are not provided for in the same way as government schooling and preschool resources.

Early childhood teaching is a specialised field of teaching. Currently the language of the AITSL teaching standards is school based and requires translation to ensure it encompasses the scope of the early childhood teachers' professional role.

A state based teacher registration system results in different requirements in each state and territory and reduces teacher mobility between states and territories. A streamlined national registration system would ensure agreed professional benchmarks linked to the teaching standards. There needs to be a rethink of teacher registration in early childhood as currently in some states registration is only possible for teachers working in the kindergarten/preschool sector or age group meaning that teachers working with children under 4 years of age are not considered to be teaching and are therefore unable to attain registration. This is at odds with international research that demonstrates the value of qualified teachers in infant and toddler programs.

Currently in some states early childhood services are not required to employ a qualified teacher as the service Director. This is not appropriate as the Director should fulfill the pedagogical leadership role in early childhood services, which would lead to increases in overall quality and in children's learning and wellbeing. It would also improve career progression opportunities. The current requirements enabling Diploma qualified educators to fill the role of Director means there is a lack of appropriate supervision for early childhood teachers and problems for provisionally registered teachers to be supervised to transition to full registration. There is also a pay disparity with an early childhood teacher potentially receiving a higher hourly rate than a Director/leader.

3. Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced.

There has been an assumption in the past that a person working in a professional role, with a professional salary would have some out of hours work. Historically teachers in schools have been compensated through a shorter working day and longer periods of annual leave. Early childhood teachers working in the long day care sector already work an 8 hour day and expectations for out of hours work is difficult. It will depend on the individual service as to the amount of non-contact time afforded to an early childhood teacher and the additional supports that may be available. In long day care services the early childhood teacher often does not work with other teachers and therefore misses out on the pedagogical support afforded within Government services where there are usually two teachers or a teacher/leader working together.

4. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

We advocate for addressing the disparity in conditions and status for early childhood teachers working in long day care services. Currently the goal for most early childhood teachers is to enter the government or private schooling sector as soon as possible. This causes significant early childhood teacher turnover, thus impacting on educational outcomes for young children.

When conditions and status are addressed, then Universities will be more supporting of encouraging graduates to pursue career opportunities within the early years sector.

There should be more concentration of teachers in long day care services and Directors should also have an early childhood Degree as a minimum qualification. This would address the issue of pedagogical and curriculum support for early childhood teachers.

Reduction in burnout for early-career teachers could also be supported by systematizing professional development and mentoring processes across all sectors where early childhood teachers work.

Finally we would suggest ensuring Standards and policies are created with early childhood teachers in mind rather than adapting and applying school based models.

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