Early Years Workforce Study

Money, Love and Identity: Initial Findings from the National ECEC Workforce Study

ECEC Workforce Development Policy Workshop
Monday, 30 May 2016, The Forum, QUT Gardens Point

Background

The **ECEC Workforce Study** is a three-year national study funded by the Australian Research Council (2014 - 2017) to identify effective strategies to grow and sustain a professional early years workforce. The study is being undertaken by a multi-disciplinary research team, from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Charles Sturt University (CSU), in collaboration with Creche and Kindergarten Association (C&K), Goodstart Early Learning and the Queensland Department of Education and Training. See Appendix 1 for details of The Research Team.

Value adding to the study, and supporting the translation of findings, the project is providing research training for three Masters students, one from each of the Partner Organisations. See Appendix 1 for the focus of nested studies.

The study

The aim of the study is to identify personal, professional and workplace factors that influence the recruitment, retention and engagement of educators in centre-based ECEC services (i.e., long day care and preschool/ kindergarten).

The study applied a mixed method research design. Data collection included:

1. A national survey of educators
    (n = 1200)

2. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 97 educators working in 13 ECEC centres; selected to be representative of diverse populations (using Australian Early Development Census [AEDC] data) and quality (using National Quality Standard [NQS] ratings). These were located in 3 distinct geographic areas in Queensland (Brisbane, Townsville and Mt Isa).

Data collection was completed in 2015; data analysis began at the end of the year and is continuing through 2016.

The policy workshop

Working in a dynamic ECEC policy context, and seeking to strengthen the translation and impact of findings, the research design included an interactive **ECEC Workforce Development Policy Workshop**. This was hosted by the research team at QUT Brisbane on 30 May 2016. The aims of the policy workshop were threefold:

- to share initial findings from the National ECEC Workforce Study;

- to seek participants' insights to deepen understanding of emerging themes; and

- to collaboratively explore policy and practice ideas to grow and sustain a professional ECEC workforce.

The workshop drew together 76 delegates from across Australia, including ECEC policy officers (Commonwealth and State), peak organisations, service operators and leaders, education and training providers (VET and University) and researchers with workforce expertise.

The workshop program was purposefully designed to achieve the stated aims, broadly based on the idea of a meta-analysis meeting (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010), and utilising facilitated conversational learning approaches (Irvine & Price, 2014; Owen, 2008; Stanfield, 2000) to interrogate and make sense of the initial findings and explore their implications for policy and practice. See Appendix 2.

Purpose and structure of this summary report

This report provides participants and other interested parties with a summary of the initial findings from the ECEC Workforce Study shared at the workshop. The report also draws together key points from conversations throughout the workshop, capturing participants' responses, observations and insights on emerging themes and their implications for policy and practice.

The report is presented in five sections:

1. **Money, love and identity: Overview of initial findings from the ECEC Workforce Study.**

2. **Tensions in ECEC: Some interesting and surprising findings.**

3. **Delving deeper – Summary of participant responses to the study findings and other prioritised workforce topics:**

- Money matters
- Money matters because it impacts quality
- Love doesn't conquer all
- Paperwork doesn't equal professionalism
- Professional identity comes from inside and out
- Growing a diverse workforce
- Increasing participation of Indigenous children and educators
- Parents as advocates
- Educators' professional agency
- Leadership
- Engaging and retaining young educators
- Managing poor performance.

4. **Key themes responding to the question: Looking forward, in an ideal world, what is one 'must have' in a national ECEC Workforce Strategy?**

5. **Appendices**

- Research team and nested projects
- Workshop program

1. Money, Love and Identity: Initial Findings from the National ECEC Workforce Study

Research aim

To identify factors that enable and impede retention and ongoing professional engagement of early years educators in the context of:

- personal positioning
- local workplace ecosystems
- national, state and agreed policies and strategies.

Research question

What factors predict retention?

Methodology

To identify factors that enable and impede retention data collection involved a national survey of 1200 educators with diverse qualifications working in long day care centres and kindergartens in a range of roles, and biographical interviews with 97 educators working in 13 Queensland ECEC preschools/kindergartens (99% educator participation within centres). Centres were recruited to maximise variation in work contexts, with consideration given to geographic area (urban, regional and remote), community complexity (AEDC), centre quality (NQS), service provider (for-profit or not for-profit) and size. Statistical modeling was used to identify key predictors of retention, with further explanation sought through thematic analysis of the interview data.

Key findings

- Twenty percent of educators (1:5) responding to the national survey intended to leave their centre in the next 12 months; eighty percent intended to stay at their centre. However, there is evidence to suggest that the larger group includes some educators who are unhappy in their work and who stay only because they have few alternative choices.

- Educators are more likely to stay if they:
    - have worked in the centre/sector for a longer time
    - are working in a higher level/leadership role
    - entered the sector for less positive reasons (e.g. no other option or drifted in)
    - are <u>not</u> intending to qualify further
    - would recommend the work
    - could leave if they wanted to.

- Dedication to particular communities may also play a role in the retention of some mature educators, with the study identifying examples of high commitment and high performance in complex communities.

- Educators are more likely to leave if they:
    - are studying for higher qualification (evidence of training to exit ECEC)
    - entered the sector because they (simply) like children (lack of understanding of complexity of work; mismatch between initial motivation and work experience).

Some take home messages

- **Money matters.** While 80% of the workforce planned to stay for the next 12 months, 20% intended to leave. This represents significant skill loss when there is a need to build the size and quality of the workforce. Looking at enablers, the majority of educators recognised the importance of their work and enjoyed working with children. However, the study also highlighted the challenge of surviving on current wages and revealed cases of extreme financial hardship. An unexpected finding was that many educators said they were only able to work in ECEC because their partner or family financially supported them. The majority of educators in long day care centres felt their wages didn't reflect their professional work, and the desire for better wages and/or wage parity with colleagues in other education contexts were the most common reasons given for leaving their current centre.

- **Money matters because it impacts quality.** Of particular concern is evidence that educators undertaking further study to increase their qualification are more likely to leave. The success of government and employer subsidies to support further education and training to enhance professionalism and the quality of ECEC programs is dependent upon these educators staying in ECEC. However, the study findings suggest that some early years educators are undertaking further study to leave their current centres. This was particularly noticeable within long day care, and where educators were upgrading to an early childhood teaching degree. Many of these educators indicated their desire to teach in standalone preschools or schools, which was motivated by heightened professional status and better pay and working conditions.

- **Love does not conquer all.** The study revealed some exceptional leaders who are committed to working in ECEC. Unlike some overseas studies showing higher turnover in more complex communities, in this sample of educators, there was evidence of commitment to complex communities, particularly amongst more mature educators. However, love of children and commitment to community is not enough to maintain and sustain the workforce. The study findings suggest that younger educators, who entered the profession with motivations such as they liked working with children or because they wanted to make a positive difference, are more likely to leave. This is likely due to unmet expectations regarding the work and/or pay.

- **Paperwork does not equal professionalism.** A profession is defined by the ability of members to exercise professional autonomy. Many educators were overwhelmed by what they frequently referred to as 'paperwork', which they saw as undermining rather then supporting their professional work in providing high quality education and care. Paperwork expectations were often seen to be dictated from above (e.g., National Quality Framework for ECEC, sponsoring organisations, service leaders), although some educators noted their own high expectations regarding professional documentation. Furthermore, the study revealed evidence of documentation being completed for its own sake rather than as a tool to support reflective practice and quality improvement. The workforce comprises professionals who are thriving but also disempowered educators who merely survive.

- **Professional identity comes from inside and out.** A strong sense of professional status or identity emerged as a key issue. However, the study findings highlight the agency and professional identity of educators is influenced by external perspectives and frameworks (e.g., parents, friends, community, colleagues in other education contexts, government). A number of individual factors were also identified.

  Furthermore, not all educators seek to have professional agency; some are happy to defer to leadership and seem to prefer more prescription and direction in their work. Taking a broader perspective, there is a tension between educator's views of their roles and responsibilities, as defined by ECEC policy and curriculum, and community perceptions. While educators talked about their years of study and role supporting early learning, they felt many in the community continued to view them simply as babysitters. Lack of professional recognition and status contributed to educators leaving their centre and their profession.

- **The need to recognise the personal cost of being an educator in ECEC.** The study findings highlight the personal cost of choosing to work in ECEC, especially in long day care settings. For many, these costs included: financial hardship; less favourable working conditions, including long and sometimes unpaid work hours; challenging work contexts causing stress and impacting on educator's mental health and general wellbeing; and a public image that fails to acknowledge the professional and educational nature of the work and thereby devalues those who choose to work in this sector.

Table 1: Priority areas of interest for the ECEC Workforce

Workshop participants identified the following priorities, grouped here under common themes. As these themes encapsulate a range of individual views, they cannot be taken to represent the views or priorities of the research team, partner organisations (C&K, Goodstart Early Learning and the Queensland Department of Education and Training), individual delegates or their organisations. Rather, the table captures multiple priorities from different standpoints and is included in the report to stimulate and inform thinking, planning and action at all levels across all areas of the ECEC sector.

Workshop participants identified the following priorities for collective consideration:

Pre-service education and training

- Workforce preparation – professional vs babysitter.
- VET at school (Cert III) – needs to be more than one day per week.
- School Counsellors – what is their role in supporting informed career choices in ECEC?
- What proactive strategies will engage educators in further education and training?

Leadership and ongoing learning

- Professional ongoing learning – educational leadership.
- Opportunities to reflect on how policies and programs at various levels might support ongoing learning.
- Mentorship and distributed leadership; Centre leadership is key.

Wages

- Link between professional practice and professional wages; Pay peanuts you get monkeys.
- Money issues – difference in amount above award and programming time.

Professional practice and identity

- Moving away from 'care narrative' to 'education narrative'.
- Try to move away from 'babysitting' to value of work.
- Professionalism of sector; Comparisons between the professionalisation of teaching in schools and ECEC.

Need for government leadership

- Ambivalence of policy areas (political football).

Men in ECEC

- Strategies to attract and retain male educators.

Growing a diverse workforce

- Participation of Indigenous children is a priority – growth of Indigenous workforce.

Learning from centres that are retaining staff

- How many educators are moving to better centres?
- Career trajectories – looking at centres that retain and do not retain staff.

2. Tensions in ECEC: Some interesting and surprising findings

Building on the national survey, early analysis of qualitative data from the biographical interviews with educators led to some interesting and, in some cases, surprising findings. These studies are based on analysis of the interviews with 97 educators from 13 ECEC centres (9 long day care centres and 4 kindergartens) across three geographic areas of Queensland (urban, regional and remote). This included educators with different qualifications (Certificate III, Diploma, Degree), and varying experience, working in a range of roles. The majority of interviews were conducted face to face within centres (2 interviews were undertaken by telephone), with a 99% participation rate across the research centres. Interviews took 20 - 75 minutes (average 45 minutes), were audio-recorded and then fully transcribed. The interviews aimed to elicit educator's work biographies (past, present and future). Questions included: *When did you decide to work in ECEC? Can I ask you about your current role – what you like most/least? What does it mean to be an educator? Do you see this as a profession – why/why not? How do others view your work? Do you expect to continue working in ECEC? What are the critical factors that would make you want to stay?* The software program NVIVO was used to manage the interview data and a process of systematic coding, both inductive and deductive, was applied to identify emergent themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Study 1: Does household income subsidise ECEC?

Background

Early years educators continue to be some of the lowest paid workers in Australia, with wages not keeping pace with rising costs of living.

Research questions

- How do those working in ECEC experience and/or rationalise the remuneration they receive compared to other occupational groups?

- To what extent does the income of other members of their households contribute to basic living expenses?

Key findings

- ECEC pay was seen as deficient by some but not all of the educators interviewed, with several rationalisations given. These included: (i) relative to other occupational groups (e.g., trades, teachers, retail and fast food workers); (ii) comparison to the effort expended and responsibilities associated with their role (e.g., educating children; unpaid hours); and (iii) consideration of the unhygienic ('dirty') aspects of the job.

- Whilst all participants acknowledged their remuneration level was low, some rationalised this as being a matter of vocational choice, where 'the love of children' did and should trump the pursuit of money in occupational decisions.

- However, vocational commitment may only trump money when educators have access to alternative sources of household income to cover life's basic necessities such as rent, food and expenses related to childrearing.

- The study findings suggest that the ECEC sector is financed not only by governments and parents, but partly by members of educator's households.

Study 2: Educators' perceptions of their work: is it a career or job?

Background

Previous research has found that job satisfaction and retention in ECEC is influenced by an educator's sense of professional status and identity, and that this is challenged by some ECEC work contexts.

Research questions

- Do educators view their work as a career or a job?

Key findings

- Most participants described their ECEC work as a career (or profession) rather than a job (n= 82)

- When asked why they perceived their work as a career, three broad reasons (categories) emerged:

  - *Child focused* - children's interests, learning and/or development.
  - *Educator focused* – educator's knowledge, training, expertise, documentation as well as affective dimensions (sense of responsibility /fun/passion).
  - *Community focused* - views of professional identity (or lack of this) in the broader community.

- Many responses point to an educational discourse as promoted in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009), that is promoting appropriate learning experiences with few related to the discourse of care. This raises a number of important questions:

  - Are educators perceiving a higher status in linking to an 'education' discourse?
  - What is the influence of the EYLF in shaping this discourse?
  - Is this at the expense of a discourse of care – or are there multiple identities?

Study 3: Insider perspectives on leadership in ECEC

Background

Previous research has pointed to the important role of service leaders in creating a work context that supports educators' day-to-day work, job satisfaction and retention. This was evident during some centre visits where observations and interview data suggested a positive and supportive workplace. This research examined perspectives of the leadership role of the centre director, from the standpoint of the directors interviewed (9 directors of long day care centres, 5 directors of kindergartens including 2 who job shared).

Research questions

- Who were these leaders?
- How do they see their role as centre directors?

Key findings

- This was a mature and experienced group of leaders. The kindergarten directors were degree qualified and the majority of long day care directors held a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification (e.g., Diploma/Advanced Diploma of ECEC).

- There were differences in career pathways. All of the long day care centre directors had started in assistant roles and upgraded their qualifications while working in ECEC, a pathway that seemed to give them confidence in their role and credibility amongst their colleagues. The willingness of these directors to 'pitch in' and work beside other educators was noted frequently, and was respected and appreciated by their staff.

- The most notable finding relates to differences in how these directors conceptualised their role according to service type. The kindergarten directors focused on their teaching role (backgrounding 'administration') whereas the long day care directors focused on their role as business managers (foregrounding role aspects such as staff management, rosters, pays, paperwork and backgrounding interactions with children).

- This is interesting when set against what these leaders said they liked most and least about their work. Irrespective of service type, these directors enjoyed: working with children and trying to make a positive difference in their lives; working with families and their local community; and supporting professional learning within their centres. Administration and 'paperwork' (including curriculum documentation expectations) was the most common area of complaint. Long day care directors also talked about the problem of recruiting skilled educators.

- Four broad and sometimes inter-linked leadership approaches were identified:
  - hierarchical;
  - collaborative;
  - enabling; and
  - being bold and brave.

- Within long day care, some tension was evidenced between the hierarchical work context (e.g., control and direction through positional leadership roles) and use of more collaborative leadership approaches (e.g., support for autonomy and shared professional responsibility). While many of these directors talked about collaborative leadership, they also noted that some educators continued to want clear direction, did not want to take on additional responsibilities beyond their designated role and deferred decision-making to positional leaders.

3. Delving deeper – Summary of participant responses to the study findings

The policy workshop drew together a diverse group of stakeholders with an interest in the ECEC workforce. Participants included policy makers, ECEC peak organisations, large ECEC employers, vocational and higher education teachers, researchers, approved providers and service leaders from across the nation. Recognising the wisdom in the room (Stanfield, 2000), the policy workshop was structured to support two-way information sharing, and included presentations on the study findings and a series of focused conversations to deepen understanding of emerging themes and their implications for policy and practice.

The workshop commenced with an overview of the ECEC workforce study, drawing the following conclusions:

- Money matters
- Money matters because it impacts quality
- Love does not conquer all
- Paperwork does not equal professionalism
- Professional identity comes from inside and out
- The need to recognise the personal cost of being an educator in ECEC.

This provided the impetus for the first conversation entitled 'first impressions'. Small conversation groups were pre-organised to maximise variation and facilitated by a member of the research team. Participants were invited to reflect and respond to the following prompts:

- How do these findings resonate with your organisational experience?
- What questions do these findings raise?
- What are your priority areas of interest?

A second research panel focused attention on interesting and surprising findings. Then, applying Open Space Technology (Owen, 2008), participants prioritised 12 workforce topics for further discussion. These included the study conclusions and the following topics:

- Growing a diverse workforce
- Increasing the participation of Indigenous children and Indigenous educators
- Parents as advocates
- Educator professional agency
- Leadership
- Engaging and retaining young educators
- Managing poor performance.

In contrast to the first conversation, these were self-organised groups. Each group was asked to reflect and respond to the following prompts:

- What is the issue? Why is it a priority?
- What's currently working well?
- What more could be done?

In this next section, participants' responses have been drawn together under the 12 prioritised workforce topics, along with the headlines from an afternoon Q&A panel comprising a mix of policy, service delivery and research perspectives. Care has been taken to include the full range of perspectives and to preserve participants' own words. Reflecting individual views, these cannot be taken to represent the views or priorities of the research team, partner organisations (C&K, Goodstart Early Learning and the Queensland Department of Education and Training), individual delegates or their organisations. Instead, the next section draws together multiple perspectives and offers a rich tool to support further thinking and action planning to support development of the ECEC workforce.

Summary of key points from facilitated conversations

Study conclusions	**1. Money matters**
	80% of the workforce planned to stay for the next 12 months. This is enabled by: • Love – of children; a sense of the value of the work. • Acceptance - perceiving no other option and being resigned to stay. • Ability to survive on the income. 20% or 1:5 educators planned to leave. This is significant when needing to build the size and quality of the workforce. Small differences in pay are insufficient to make a significant change. Bigger structural change is likely the solution. **Initial responses to these findings:** • *Resonates; nothing is a surprise so far; mirrors experiences of workforce.* • *Turnover not surprising in LDC; expected in LDC.* • *Seems high if includes kindergartens; structural differences between kindergarten and LDC more significant.* • *Surprising that pay issues weren't louder; small differences in pay not making a difference.*
What are the issues and priorities?	Professional work professional pay • Tension between professionalisation of workforce and career opportunities alongside low pay. • Money issues – difference in amount above award wage plus conditions (e.g., amount of programming time). • Perception of more unpaid hours – to manage contact work and other expectations; unpaid work; overwork = leave. Churn • How many of those leaving are moving to better centres? Work context and other influences • Consideration of retirement vs millennial employment patterns; impact of older workforce (in particular kindergarten). • Similarly, specific issues relating to younger workforce –changing careers more often is common outside ECEC. What is similar to other sectors/unique to ECEC? • Regional – some staying because of limited alternatives. • Union membership; do we need more voice in the union? • Ambivalence of policy areas; this is a political football.
What's working well?	Enhanced benefits (e.g., subsidised child care fees for educators) • Employer and child care subsidies were significant for some of the study participants (e.g., 50% child care subsidy, child in centre with parent). • Women often have a child in ECEC and they work in these settings because of security. • Job quality impacts retention and may offset pay in some contexts. (e.g., work enjoyable, good social relations, autonomy, work/family balance).
What more could be done?	More research • Looking (more closely) at centres that retain and do not retain staff. • There may be other ways to augment wages (e.g., other benefits). Men in ECEC • Need to identify ways to recruit and retain men in ECEC; Need to find out more about why men are choosing to work in ECEC/staying in ECEC; A professionally trained, highly paid workforce will attract men to the profession. Profiling career and benefits • Need to profile more the benefits of the work (job quality). Addressing wages • Still need a wage that is commensurate with professional skill, commitment and hours of work (i.e. professional wage).

Study conclusions	**2. Money matters because it impacts quality**	
	Among those leaving were educators undertaking higher qualifications, particularly in LDC. There is evidence to suggest that educators are engaging in further study to leave their ECEC service, moving to preschools, the school sector and outside of education in search of better wages and conditions. Of those not currently engaged in education and training, few were planning to undertake further study.	**Initial responses to these findings:** • *Does further training change an educator's commitment/retention?* • *Dismay – study to leave – younger ones leaving.* • *How much relates to transitional factors; what are the background issues (e.g., NQF context)?* • *How can we 'future proof'?*
What are the issues and priorities?	Early childhood teachers • Staff training to go to schools and other jobs with better pay and conditions; Primary school drain. • Educators from school reluctant to get experience in kindy due to Industrial Relations distinctions. Young educators • Insufficient training at Assistant level; need for professional development targeted toward this group. • Are some younger educators 'pushed up' too early – before they are qualified and ready?	• Problem with Certificate III qualified assistants not having their expectations met in the workforce. Leadership training • Insufficient training for directors. Quality of education and training • The identity and quality of the RTO; quality of education and training, lots of dodgy operators. • How can we improve workforce training and practical support for students and supervisors? • Practicum/work placements can be overwhelming; quality practicum experience is important.
What's working well?	• The emphasis on further study, and related support for educators to upgrade their qualifications is commended. This positively impacts the sense of increasing professionalism – for educators, parents and the community.	• Professionalising the ECEC workforce requires a focus on qualifications.
What more could be done?	Early career advice • Better career advice to young people (e.g. high school); What is the role of school counsellors? Early work experience 'Try before you buy'; Training at school requires more than one day per week. Focus on nature of education and training • Relevant workplace exposure needed through Certificate III level education and training; More support to ensure quality placements.	• Attention to the role of directors and educational leaders. • Fostering the agency of VET qualified educators (Diploma and Certificate III). • Improving information and support for work placement supervisors. Profiling career and benefits • Need to profile more the benefits of the job. • Strategies to enhance job quality; work enjoyable, good social relations, autonomy – but still need a decent wage.

Study conclusions	**3. Love does not conquer all** There was evidence of commitment to complex communities, particularly amongst more mature educators. However, younger educators, who entered the profession for positive motivations (e.g., they liked working with children; wanted to make a positive difference) are more likely to leave. **Initial responses to these findings:** • *Surprising there is less turnover in the complex communities – could be* *because some are in small towns where there are fewer alternative employment opportunities.* • *Can we do more to support educators in complex communities?* • *Dismay that younger educators are leaving.* • *Younger people changing careers – common also outside ECEC.*
What are the issues and priorities?	Younger educators • Are some 'pushed up' too early? What will keep younger people in the profession? Educator wellbeing • Where services are in vulnerable regions, some educators struggle with meeting their own needs (erodes self-esteem). • Need to consider the mental health and wellbeing of educators. • What goes on behind closed doors – the emotional cost of working in ECEC. Teamwork • Early educators need respect and a voice in a multi-disciplinary team.
What's working well?	Professional learning and support • Varied models of training – going beyond general education context. • Pre-service and in-service training to work in partnership and support families. • Training and support – need to help educators to feel connected and supported. • Investing additional funds to provide training and support and to build community connectedness (e.g., Goodstart Enhancing Children's Outcomes [EChO] centres). Sense of connectedness • Providing time during work to form community networks. Increased focus on educator wellbeing • Sponsoring organisations – establishing wellbeing teams. Being very aware of burnout and rolling out training on mental health and staff wellbeing. New leave provisions (e.g., cultural leave, family violence leave) and more flexible approach to educator leave.
What more could be done?	Research into retention in complex communities • Look at qualities, qualifications and experience as well as length of service of educators working in high complex services/communities. • What more can we do to support the committed staff? More qualified staff • Employing more highly qualified staff to work with children under 3 years in these communities. • Best students harnessed into working into more difficult areas. Focus on building individual resilience and capability • Annual appraisals supporting professional development choices to build educator capability to work in complex areas. • Proactive strategies to support educator mental health and wellbeing; build resilience. Building multi/inter-disciplinary teams • Employment strategy to support multi-disciplinary teams working within and with these services.

Study conclusions	# 4. Paperwork does not equal professionalism

A profession is defined by the ability to exercise professional autonomy.

Many educators were overwhelmed by what they described as 'paperwork'. This included educational documentation (child observations, learning stories, child journals, transition statements), health and safety checklists, parent information and other administrative paperwork.

Paperwork expectations were seen to be set by others (e.g., service leaders, ECEC organisations and/or policymakers), although some teachers/educators also set high expectations for themselves.

Most saw the volume of paperwork as undermining rather then supporting their professional work in providing high quality education and care.

Initial responses to these findings:
- *Resonates with experiences but findings about 'paperwork' are concerning.*
- *Time for programming not given.*
- *Whose expectations – bureaucratic, organisational/ service and/or self imposed?*

What are the issues and priorities?

What is the 'paperwork'?
- Sector over-burden. Educators' perceptions and experiences of 'overwhelming paperwork' or 'paperwork overload'.
- Different perceptions of expectations of 'paperwork' – parents, educators, government.
- Fear of failure – NQF Assessment and Rating; Is paperwork fit for purpose or overkill?
- Sense that 'staging' and documenting learning is reducing time for 'engaging' with children.
- Sense of 'paperwork' as surveillance;

Accountability – 'counting things' Vs 'giving an account'.
- Sense of 'paperwork' as 'busy work'.

Time and support
- Lack of time to complete paperwork, in particular, program time. Some educators talking about programming time as a 'gift' rather than a professional entitlement.
- Number of children impacts work.

Educator skill
- Lack of confidence and skill – knowing what to write as well as ability to articulate the 'why we do what we do each day'.
- Literacy issues for some educators.

What's working well?

Clarity on what is needed and why
- Clear articulation of 'intention' of paperwork/documentation within the learning environment; realistic expectations.

Collaboration and support to complete curriculum documentation
- Collaborative planning and documentation across the team.
- (In good centres) educators given adequate time to think, analyse and document.
- (In good centres) parity of access to programming time – all educators (at all levels) having access to programming.
- Good support systems for educators; centre-based professional conversations.
- Use of online documentation platforms – involving children, families and educators (although connectivity needs to be strong to enable this).

What more could be done?

Clarify expectations
- Determine what 'paperwork' is needed to support quality programs and practices? ACECQA to look at best practice ideas.
- What is required by NQF - communicate expectations broadly (ECEC organisations, service providers, educators, families, AOs, education and training providers).
- Identify efficiency opportunities - measure once for multiple purposes.
- Reduce focus on paperwork as accountability; trust professionalism.

Leadership and support
- Building local leadership to guide and support meaningful documentation and guard against 'busy work'.
- Building educator confidence and capacity to identify significant moments and document learning. Educators able to articulate 'why we do what we do'.
- Quarantine time for programming. Benefit in collaborative/team programming time.
- How can technology support more efficient 'paperwork'?
- What do families want/need?
- Shared approach to problem solving (e.g. regulatory/ registration bodies, peak organisations, training institutions).

Study conclusions	**5. Professional identity comes from inside and out**

5. Professional identity comes from inside and out

Lack of professional recognition and status contributed to educators leaving their centre and their profession.

Educators exercise agency in terms of their professional identity. The majority of educators interviewed recognised the importance of their work and described it as a profession.

However, the majority also perceived that the professional nature of their work was not seen nor valued by the broader community.

A profession generally comprises an overarching professional association and codes of conduct with capacity to shut out underperformers. A profession enables a degree of autonomy and ability to apply knowledge in the abstract. Professionals are often able to delegate work to para- professionals.

Initial responses to these findings:
- *What needs to happen to remove the stigma of 'babysitting'?*
- *Need for a professional ECEC workforce – children and parents deserve professionals.*

What are the issues and priorities?

Educator's sense of identity and agency
- Do educators see themselves as professionals? Some educators don't identify with 'professionalism', NQS and further education.
- Need for educators to have professional agency – taking initiative and responsibility for acting Vs desire to be told how to perform their role (e.g, recipe).

Professional preparation
- Educators need to engage with study to become professional; It is about raising the standard and up-skilling the workforce.

- What is the workforce preparation – professional educator or babysitter?
- Focus on professional practice and critical reflection.

Community status
- Educators not being seen as having status and value by parents and community.

Professional wages
- Tension between professionalism, career opportunities and low pay.

Quality control
- Need to work with poor performers to improve practice or performance manage out.

What's working well?

Professional expectations
- NQF has assisted in building professional identity.
- ECA Code of Ethics.
- Clear position descriptions and explicit career pathways.
- Discussion about ECT registration.

Local leadership
- Where there is strong leadership. Directors fostering autonomy, independent decision-making, distributed leadership, culture of learning. It is about giving educators 'permission to act', shifting from compliance to a focus on ongoing learning and improvement.

Engaging parents
- At centre level – two-way communication with families about educational context – starting at enrolment.
- The Parenthood, online communities, parent portal.

Community awareness
- Current social media campaigns (e.g., Queensland Kindy Counts!)
- Leveraging related school initiatives (e.g., Supporting transition to school)
- Look at overseas examples. Child rights focus. In France, Germany, Sweden and Finland educators have higher status.

What more could be done?

ECEC as public good
- ECEC as public good not business.
- Working to be seen as equal to school system and teachers.
- This is a journey. Culture change is a long process. Learn from the experience of other female dominated professions e.g., nursing, teaching.

Professional identity and agency
- How to foster a sense of agency and autonomy in all educators; exercising leadership at all levels.
- *Perhaps*, moving away from 'care narrative' to 'education narrative' OR integrated professional identity – importance of care

and education.
- Use of social media, positive media.
- Educating parents to be advocates.
- Continued focus on ongoing professional learning for all roles.
- Need for internal/external advocacy.

This is a shared responsibility
- *Government* support for upgrading qualifications and professional development; value of ECEC work.
- *Employer's* responsibility to create a positive work environment and not lose qualified and experienced educators.
- *Educators* to have agency, autonomy and be professional.

Other workshop priorities	**6.** **Growing a diverse workforce**	
What are the issues and priorities?	Lack of information • There is a silence in the literature on cultural diversity in the ECEC workforce and a lack of data to quantify extent of impact. • Importance of acknowledging and recognising cultural profiles of educators. Cultural competence • There is a fear of asking educators where are you from? Educators are generally better at exploring cultural diversity and communicating with children, but not as good with colleagues.	Career pathways • Need to be more inclusive in supporting the professional learning and career paths for educators with diverse cultural backgrounds.
What's working well?	• Role of personal and group reflection in services and organisations. Making this a focus for ongoing professional learning.	• Some existing small initiatives (e.g. Workforce Action Plans to build diversity of workforce).
What more could be done?	More research • Further research and analysis of agency and ethnicity. Promoting and supporting a diverse workforce • Foregrounding cultural diversity as a strength. • Greater focus on funding and initiatives to build a more culturally diverse ECEC workforce. • Strategies to build the capacity and retention of culturally diverse educators. • Improved processes for recognition of	overseas qualifications; supported by clear pathways and bridging courses to obtain recognition. This is a shared responsibility • Need sector-wide leadership and local level unconscious bias – everyone's role. • Partnerships that support culturally diverse educators to become qualified and continue their professional learning. • Working with communities and respected cultural leaders to grow a diverse workforce and ensure culturally relevant programs and practices.

Other workshop priorities	**7. Increasing the participation of Indigenous children and Indigenous educators**
What are the issues and priorities?	Cultural safety • Non-Indigenous staff not sure where to start – cultural safety is an issue. • Training in cultural safety all levels. Support and encouragement • Strategies to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in the sector. • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff linked to the participation of children. Guard against stereotypes/limitations • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals – not to be held out as the 'go to' person on Aboriginal/ cultural issues. Research • The data around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff needs analysis.
What's working well?	• Yarn ups. • Reconsidering the EYLF – looking at the New Zealand (bi-cultural) curriculum framework. • Research on services with high participation of Indigenous children and characteristics of their workforce.
What more could be done?	• Differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need to be recognised. • Engage families and communities; building relationships with communities. • Start with the outcomes for each child. • Narragunnawali – ECEC Rap resources. • Leadership capabilities are key. • Strategies to counter risk averse approach to engagement and concerns about 'making mistakes' when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. • This is a shared responsibility – government, community, services, educators and families.

Other workshop priorities	**8. Parents as advocates**
What are the issues and priorities?	• Parents may not be aware of the professional work and educational contribution of educators in ECEC; Characteristics of quality educational programs and practices. • Governance of services – change in parent/community management approaches. Now advisory. • Need to build broader community awareness. Big picture - Where do we see our children as citizens?
What's working well?	• Kindy Counts (Queensland Government initiative). • Proactive centre-based communication with parents – newsletters, interviews, parent portals. • Parent advocacy groups (The Parenthood), including online communities.
What more could be done?	• Parents need 'education' – about early learning, the role of play in learning, quality programs and practices. Link back to the NQF. • Research parents – diverse groups. • Use research to target key messages (e.g., what messages do parents have? What information are they seeking/ needing?). • Parents are an important group to mobilise.

Other workshop priorities	**9. Educator professional agency**
	The study presentations prompted discussion about what makes a particular area of work a profession. It was suggested the characteristics of a profession may include: a professional qualification entry point, an internal code of ethics, and the capacity for members of the profession to exercise agency and autonomy in their work.
What are the issues and priorities?	• Question agency of Certificate III qualified educators (and Diploma qualified). VET/RTO system in crisis. • Need to promote the ethical dimension of ECEC work; changing other peoples' lives. • Focus on accountability – 'counting things' Vs 'giving an account'. • Is the sector over-regulated? Reflect on recommendations of *Starting Strong*. Meaning and interpretation of standards is key.
What's working well?	• Increased qualification requirements. Minimum qualification (Certificate III) is a good start. But is this sufficient as an entry qualification?
What more could be done?	• Need a strong qualifications base. • Focus on a professional workforce capable of professional judgment – high level of trust required. • Building leadership capacity. Directors have to foster autonomy, independent decision-making; distributed leadership. • Leaders fostering a culture of learning, giving 'permission to act'; shifting from a compliance to a development approach. • Strategies to build the confidence and agency of educators; educators taking action with responsibility vs desire to be given a 'recipe' or being told what/how to do.

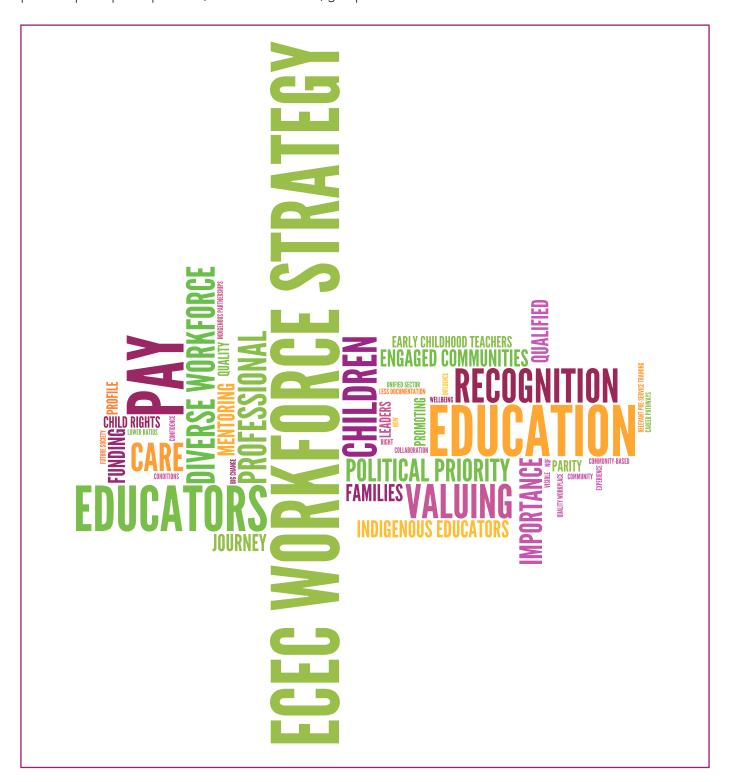|		
Other workshop priorities	**10.** **Leadership** The study found differences in how directors saw their role. Preschool/Kindergarten directors focused on their teaching role (backgrounding 'administration'); Long day care directors focused on their role as business managers (foregrounding staff management, rosters, pays, paperwork and backgrounding interactions with children).	Four leadership approaches were identified: hierarchical; collaborative; enabling; and being bold and brave. In long day care, some tension was evidenced between hierarchical work contexts and collaborative leadership approaches.
What are the issues and priorities?	• Educational leadership is often given to the teacher who is new to role. • Need to be clearer about leadership; clarity on full scope of the leader's role. • Leaders able to work with different stakeholders; manage tensions. • Role of the Educational Leader; Director is also a leader of learning.	• Concern about separation of business and teaching leadership; need to integrate leadership functions to ensure decision-making is based on content knowledge. • Leadership challenges in small communities; community management structures.
What's working well?	• Principals are school leaders and are also teachers. • Mentoring programs; Lead educators mentoring assistant educators.	• Succession planning in place. • Distributed leadership approaches. • Leadership professional learning networks/ communities of practice.
What more could be done?	• Capability building for directors – including business skills. • Pre-service education and training including people management, finance, communication skills. • Promoting and supporting leadership role of all educators; distributed leadership models.	• Professional learning occurring with teams within services; discovering new ways of working together builds motivation and collaboration. • Mentoring embedded in workplace learning. • Organisational support models. • Support for volunteer committees.

Other workshop priorities	**11.** **Engaging and retaining young educators**
	Amongst the 20% leaving are young educators who entered ECEC for positive reasons (they liked the idea of working with children; wanted to make a positive difference in children's lives).
What are the issues and priorities?	• Is turnover amongst youth a generational or system-level issue; and has this changed over time? • What are young educators' perceptions of their manager? • Leadership is key; concern about insufficient training at director level. • Leadership expectations (e.g., paperwork expectations). • Quality of education and training; particularly RTOs. Insufficient training of assistant educators. • Quality of practicums. • Professional development for Certificate III educators. • Pay levels and increments – Certificate III to Diploma. • Why do they leave? Thinking about: difficult/ challenging work; low status and recognition; high expectations of parents. • Importance of succession planning.
What's working well?	• Director support. This includes work hours, breaks, support in difficult situations, appreciation, non-contact hours for curriculum planning and documentation.
What more could be done?	• Test age versus tenure as a foundation of turnover intentions. • Need for better resourcing to support training outside of work hours (paid training).

Other workshop priorities	**12.** **Managing poor performance**
	Amongst the 80% staying at their centre, is a group of trapped and unhappy educators who are staying because they have no choice to leave.	**Initial responses to these findings:** • *Concern about unmotivated people staying in ECEC.*
What are the issues and priorities?	• People working in ECEC who are poor performers and do not want to leave. • Some not staying for the right reasons. • Complacent educators. • Need consistency of quality; Need great people staying.
What's working well?	• Clear position descriptions and performance frameworks; educators are clear about performance expectations and can see what success looks like. • Expectation for ongoing learning.
What more could be done?	• Wrong people staying - Who is a 'wrong' person? Everyone changes, matures, grows up and they may go on to make good educators. • More practical support and access to ongoing professional learning. • Need to ensure prospective educators have access to good information about work. • In a profession, poor performers are 'shut' out.

Figure 1: In an ideal world, what is one 'must have' in a national ECEC Workforce Strategy?

With the Current National Early Years Workforce Strategy 2012 - 2016 (SCSEEC, 2012) about to end, the workshop concluded by asking participants to reflect on the study findings and their conversations with others throughout the day, and to identify one 'must have' in a new national ECEC Workforce Strategy. Figure 1 below highlights key themes that emerged, and provides some indication of the strength of these themes. Table 2 (over the page) presents participants' priorities, in their own words, grouped under common themes.

Table 2: In an ideal world, what is one 'must have' in a national ECEC Workforce Strategy?

Valuing the importance of ECEC

- Importance of early years education for children: child at the centre.
- Early Childhood Education and Care is central to building a future society on difference.
- It is still a journey but need to profile the value of ECEC.

- A public awareness campaign that highlights the importance and value of early childhood:
  - the importance of early learning and development
  - of play
  - of early childhood educators.

Political priority

- Big change fairly quickly. Influencing the political mindset.
- Children have the right to be in education services (ECEC) and programs with highly engaged and intelligent educators.
- Why can't we adopt the Scandinavian model where ECEC is prioritised?

- Every child having access to quality education. Politicians, parents, owners, community to acknowledge the importance of ECEC and funding to the sector.
- Influence in the political landscape.

Professional recognition of educators

- Recognition and pay. It is still a journey but need to profile the value of ECEC.
- Equity in professional stature through:
  - awards
  - recognition
  - community connections
  - political influence
  - professional qualifications.

- Professional bodies/organisations/platforms.
- Valuing the profession.
- Raise the profile of ECEC educators (ECEC advocacy).
- Promotion of the value of educators in child outcomes (influencing the critical years of a child's life) in education and care.

Better pay

- Recognition through pay.
- Recognition and pay. It is still a journey but need to profile the value of ECEC.
- Recognition and pay. It may be a journey but have we really taken the first step that is visible to the wider community and government.
- Recognition of professionalism and the right to a

decent salary. This has been a journey. We should come to the end and do something about it - now - not then.
- Wages and conditions.
- Well paid.
- Well paid trained educators who love their job and are highly valued.

Pay parity

- A workforce strategy that provides pay parity with the school system based on the principle of the 'UN Rights of the Child' as a global citizen.

- More government funding for kindergarten programs so we can increase pay in ECEC (also LDC with kindy programs).
- Pay parity to school sector.

Positive workplaces

- Quality of educators' work environment is key to the quality of their practice.

- Lowering ratios of educators to children. This will allow more time for one on one/small group experiences, less staff stress and higher quality education.

Leadership

- Have all leaders in the sector supporting and leading their educators to provide quality care; happy educators-happy children.
- Mentoring.
- Support and mentorship.

Unified ECEC sector

- Unity for the sector; employers and employees to pursue the rights/benefits of both.

Clear career pathways

- There must be clear pathways to, and distinctive role for, the three key positions:
  - on the floor educators
  - directors
  - early childhood teachers/educational leaders.

Growing diversity of the ECEC workforce

- A diverse workforce that reflects broader community.
- Cultural diversity.
- More people with a disability.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators

- Increased diversity especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the workforce.
- More Indigenous educators.
- A good relationship with Traditional Owners to form strong partnerships as part of community engagement to assist with recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators.

Education and training

- Collaboration between all stakeholders to strengthen graduate confidence and understanding of the NQF, in particular QA1 educational programs and practices.
- Relevant and adequate pre-service and in-service training for the ECEC workforce, particularly given growing complexity in the lives of families and communities.

Qualified and skilled teachers and educators

- 4-year early childhood university qualified teachers in all rooms.
- Trained and well paid educators who love their job
- and are highly valued.
- Children have the right to be in ECEC programs with highly engaged and intelligent educators.

Family and community engagement

- Keeping communities engaged; enabling children, parents and communities to have a sense of ownership of early learning in the ECEC service.
- Return to community-based ECEC.

Minimising documentation

- Minimising unnecessary documentation to support staff wellbeing – reducing stress.

More male educators

- Increase male participation and retention as educators by 20% by 2022.
- Incorporate a strategy that includes men.

Where to from here?

Drawing together a mixed group of colleagues to discuss the ECEC workforce, as a shared topic of interest and importance, generated new and rich insights and understandings of the emerging themes. Through a series of facilitated conversations, participants contemplated the typicality and application of the findings to the broader ECEC sector and possible reasons for these findings. More importantly, within the context of applied research, participants shared their views on current successes as well as areas for further exploration, action and improvement.

Data gathered through the workshop, captured here in this summary report, is shaping and informing the ongoing work of the research team and our partner organisations. Research papers currently in development include:

- An overview of the factors predicting the retention of educators in centre-based ECEC

- Professional identity

- Insider perspectives on leadership in ECEC

- Men in ECEC

- Perceptions of 'paperwork' as an attribute of professionalism in ECEC.

A paper reflecting on the use and efficacy of the policy workshop methodology is also planned.

In addition, the workshop highlighted some shared priorities for further fine-grained analyses. These include:

- Factors influencing the diversity of the ECEC workforce

- Factors influencing the attraction and retention of Indigenous educators

- Early childhood teachers' perspectives of their work in centre-based ECEC

- Education and training pathways

- The motivations and dynamics of subsidisation at work and at home

- Family and community engagement.

Other priorities are likely to emerge as the team works through a large and very rich data set.

Since the policy workshop, ECEC Workforce Study scholarship holder Sharon McKinlay has been awarded her Master of Education (Research). She is presently writing her first paper addressing the timely topic: What keeps Early Childhood Teachers working in long day care? Kirsty Cranitch's research examines how professional identity shapes early years educators' attraction to the ECEC sector and their intentions to stay and pursue aligned qualifications. The research will inform policy responses to the problem of high turnover and the goal of fostering a sustainable and engaged workforce. Michelle Binstadt, also an ECEC Workforce Study scholarship holder, is preparing for Oral Confirmation. Her study will explore the contribution of localised multi-disciplinary professional networks to the work and retention of service leaders in complex communities.

Soon after the policy workshop, an article reporting the loss of qualified and skilled educators within the ECEC workforce published in The Conversation (23/6/16) generated considerable media and public attention with over 14,766 hits (See https://theconversation.com/one-in-five-early-childhood-educators-plan-to-leave-the-profession-61279). The article was republished on Early Childhood Australia's The Spoke.

Finally, the study is informing the ongoing work of our partner organisations to build and sustain a qualified, professional and engaged ECEC workforce. This includes the development and review of the Queensland ECEC Workforce Action Plan (See http://deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/pdfs/workforce-action-plan-16-19.pdf). Conversations are also exploring the potential for our national survey data to value add to existing national ECEC data sets, to inform future workforce policy and activities at the national and state level.

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Appendix 1

The ECEC Workforce Research Team

QUT

- Professor Karen Thorpe,
  (Lead Chief Investigator, School of Psychology and Counseling, Health)

- Associate Professor Susan Irvine,
  (School of Early Childhood, Education)

- Professor Paula McDonald,
  (Business School, Management)

- Professor Jo Lunn,
  (School of Early Childhood, Education)

- Victoria Sullivan,
  (Research Manager, Centre for Children's Health Research)

- Dr Elena Jansen,
  (Research Associate, Centre for Children's Health Research)

CSU

- Professor Jennifer Sumsion,
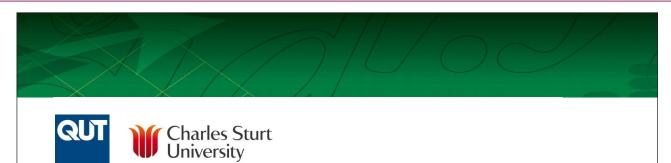 (Early Childhood Education)

Partner Investigators

- Dr Pam Spall,
  Manager, Research and Evaluation, C&K

- Dr Kate Liley,
  National Research Manager, Goodstart Early Learning

- Dr Mary Lincoln,
  Director, Early Learning Pathways, Division of ECEC, Queensland Department of Education and Training

- Dr Angela Ferguson,
  Director, Research Services, Queensland Department of Education and Training

Masters Research Students

- Ms Sharon McKinlay,
  Goodstart Early Learning
  Title of study: *Building a sustainable workforce in ECEC: What keeps early childhood teachers working in long day care?*

- Ms Michele Binstadt,
  C&K
  Title of study: *Growing and sustaining a professional early years workforce: The role of multi-disciplinary networks in supporting professional practice.*

- Ms Kirsty Cranitch,
  Queensland Department of Education and Training.
  Title of study: *How does professional identity shape early years educators' attraction to the ECEC sector and their intentions to stay or leave the sector?*

Appendix 2

QUT **Charles Sturt University**

ECEC Workforce Development Policy Workshop
Monday 30 May 2016
10:00am - 4:30pm
The Forum room – P419
QUT Gardens Point, 2 George Street, BRISBANE 4000

9:30am	Registrations open
10:00am	Welcome; Purpose and structure of the workshop
10:15am	*Money, Love and Identity: Initial findings from the national ECEC Workforce Study* (Presentation)
11:30am	Conversation 1 – First impressions • How do these findings resonate with participants' experiences? • What questions do these findings raise? • What are the priority areas of interest?
12:15pm	Lunch
1:00pm	*Tensions*: *Some interesting and surprising findings* (Research panel). This will include perspectives on: • Wages and conditions; • The profession; • Leadership.
1:50pm	Conversation 2 - Delving deeper • This conversation will provide opportunity to prioritise shared topics of interest and explore these with colleagues.
3:00pm	Afternoon tea
3:20pm	*Thinking about policy and practice* (Q&A panel). This will include perspectives from our Partner Organisations (Queensland Department of Education and Training, C&K and Goodstart Early Learning).
4:10pm	Summing up
4:30pm	Close

Early Years Workforce Study