



Investing in our future: Growing the education and care workforce

NOVEMBER 2021



EARLY
LEARNING
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AUSTRALIA



Community Early Learning Australia

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) is a not for profit organisation with a focus on amplifying the value of early learning for every child across Australia - representing our members and uniting our sector as a force for quality education and care. Founded over 40 years ago we represent over 1600 early education and care services employing 21,000 plus educators. Our national influence is extended through publications and social media which have a circulation of 52,000 per week and our learning and development program which trains over 7,000 educators per year in quality practice and governance.

More information about CELA can be found at www.cela.org.au



Early Learning Association Australia

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak body which works in partnership with early learning providers and parents to deliver our vision of excellence in learning for every child. Our diverse membership base includes 630 service providers managing services at over 1,250 locations with more than 15,000 staff caring and educating 70,000 children. Our members are early years management organisations, independent kindergartens, local governments, long day care services, government and independent schools and out of school hours care programs.

More information about ELAA can be found at www.elaa.org.au



Community Child Care Association

Community Child Care Association (CCC) has been the voice of community owned and managed education and care services across Victoria for 50 years. Our 700+ service members rely on us for free professional advice and support, and to keep them up to date with industry standards, best practices and the implementation of government policy. CCC is here to help services transform their vision into practice and we offer membership, quality training and consultancy services.

More information about CCC can be found at www.cccinc.org.au

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

This paper is prepared by Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) and Community Child Care (CCC).

The education and care sector, including long day care, kindergartens, preschools, family day care, occasional care and outside school hours care, is a vital part of the landscape for how babies and children are educated and cared for in this country. High quality education and care provides significant benefits for children's learning, development and wellbeing, as well as supporting families, particularly women, to engage in employment and training.

High quality education and care is strongly linked to the availability of a well-trained and stable workforce. Our members provide higher quality education than many other providers. Our services invest in their staff and their community, often paying staff above award wages and funding professional learning to support staff retention and development. Most of our members, as a result, enjoy relatively higher levels of staff retention, and children in turn benefit from longer, more stable relationships with educators at a time in their lives when relationships are critically important for their development. Despite these protective factors, our workforce has been impacted heavily by Coronavirus (COVID-19).

In this paper we examine current workforce pressures, their impact on education and care services and possible ways forward. In the context of the release of the ACECQA workforce strategy and a focus on workforce in many states, we propose a range of measures to support our sector to attract, develop and retain our vital workforce.

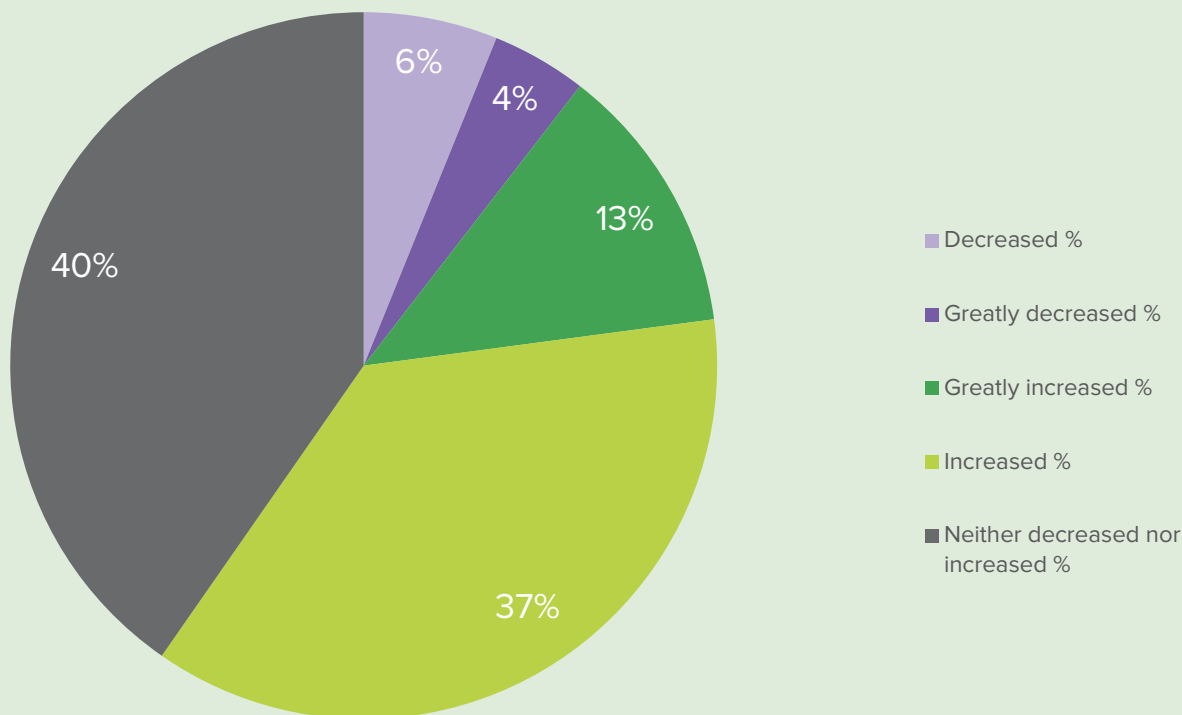
Workforce Survey

We prepared a survey that was distributed to CCC, CELA and ELAA members. We received 747 responses which represented over 3300 sites, with the bulk of responses being received from services in Victoria and New South Wales. Survey responses were received from a wide range of services, with most respondents operating kindergarten/preschool or long day care services.

Staff turnover had increased or greatly increased in nearly half of all services since the beginning of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Figure 1). There were a range of reasons for turnover increasing, predominately a lack of access to casuals causing additional stress, and staff leaving the sector. The impacts of COVID-19 are significant, with many services highlighting that staff are taking sick leave due to mental health and exhaustion, and that the need to test and isolate was exacerbating shortages.

Figure 1

Staff turnover since the pandemic



With Victoria and New South Wales progressively re-opening these factors have not diminished. Growing case numbers in education and care, combined with families returning to work and children returning to services, means the impact of COVID-19 may increase. However, it is hoped the adoption of test and return measures, including rapid antigen testing, will support more children to return to settings earlier and provide reassurance for staff.

Nearly half of all job vacancies in education and care settings remained unfilled in early 2021. Services reported over 4,500 vacancies (minimum) had been advertised in the first six months of 2021. The most common position advertised was at the certificate III level and the diploma level which each had over 1400 vacancies advertised. Vacancies for teachers were high at over 700 vacancies.

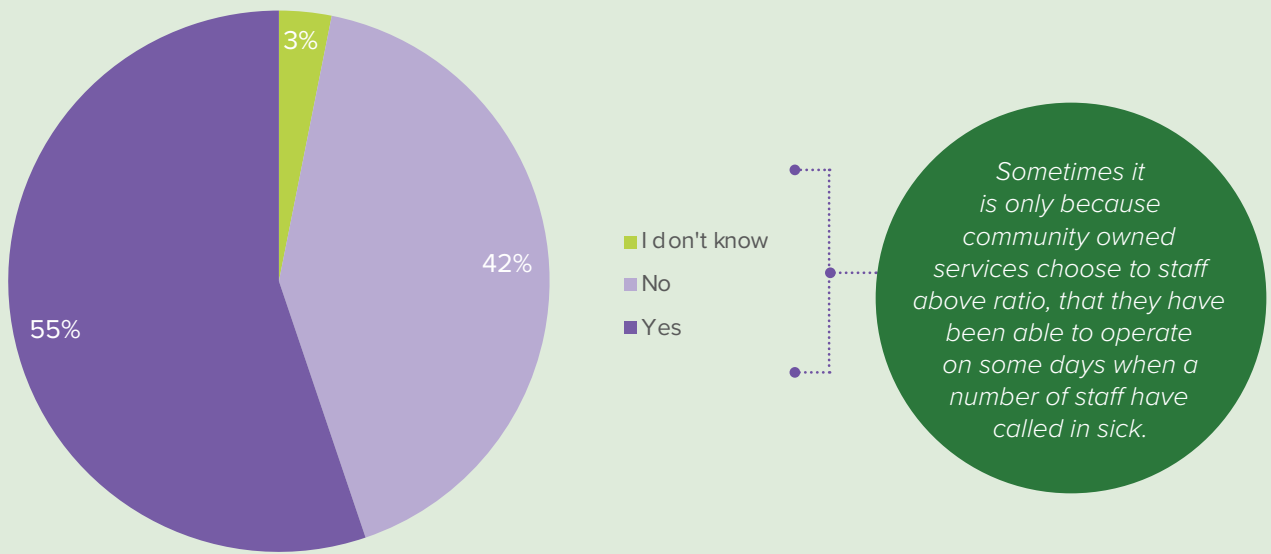
Reasons services raised around the difficulty with recruitment were mostly about poor pay and conditions contributing to a lack of applicants, as well as the poor quality of graduates.

"We have never before had so much difficulty recruiting educators. We have a good reputation and usually have multiple applicants. Since June last year we have hardly any applicants and our educators are working harder than ever to provide children with consistent high-quality care but the strain of not being able to recruit is showing. We are having increased absences... that further impacts on the other educators."

Over half of all services have made changes to service delivery to respond to the staff shortages (Figure 2) – in addition to reducing quality by dropping back to ‘at ratio’ delivery, and staff working additional hours.

Figure 2

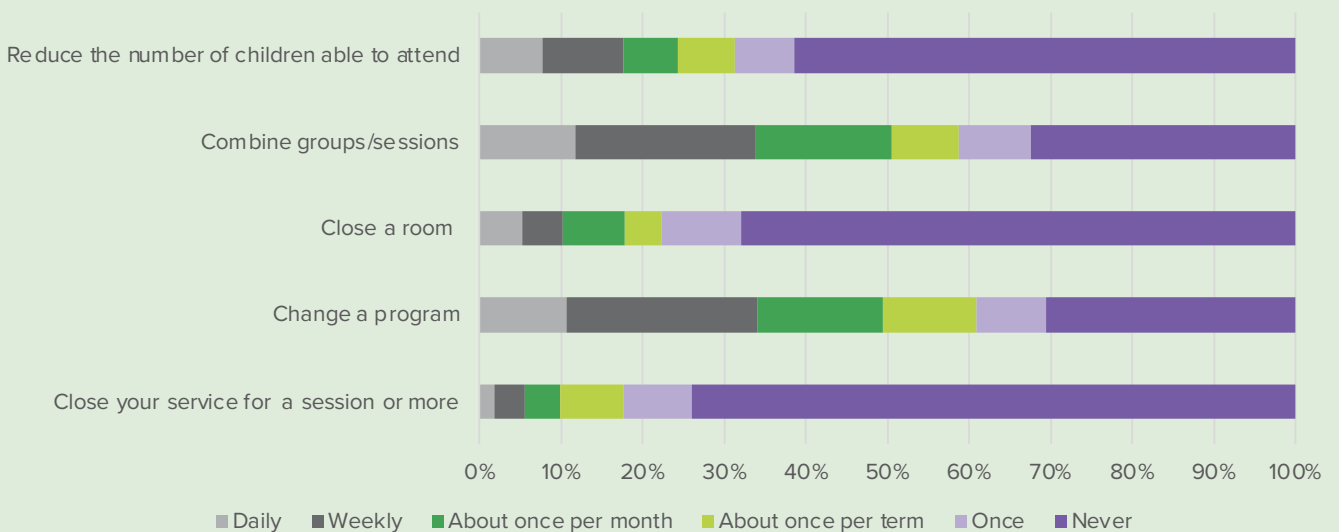
Needed to make changes to service delivery due to shortage of staff



Over a third of services changed programs or combined groups on a daily or weekly basis (Figure 3). More concerning almost a quarter of services had reduced the number of children attending on a monthly basis. Around one in five services had closed a room or service at least once a term.

Figure 3

Frequency of changes made to service provision due to staff shortages



Finding and retaining staff is a challenge faced by many services. High vacancy rates, despite the prevalence of the use of above award pay to attract staff illustrates the enormous challenge for the sector.

However, change is possible. Targeted funding and a commitment to growing the workforce will bear rewards. The ACECQA Workforce Strategy provides a path forward if the strategies it articulates are funded, implemented and findings shared and scaled. Investment is needed at all levels of government, with a coordinated strategy that ensures we invest in, implement and evaluate what works. This includes priority investment in the below strategies.

Recommendation 1: Improve pay and conditions of sector employees

Improving pay and conditions is a priority, and the recently re-negotiated Victorian Early Childhood Teacher and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) with terms and conditions which are significantly more beneficial than the modern awards and many other relevant agreements in the sector shows it is possible to have pay parity. Pay parity with similar level qualifications will ensure the 'return on investment' for completing qualifications stacks up.

It is critical that children's access to education and care is not impacted by improved conditions for staff through increased fees for parents. Investment from government is needed that is tied to wage increases, including the recent Fair Work wage adjustment. Governments should investigate a universal industrial relations instrument that can provide professional wages and conditions to early childhood education and care staff across settings.

Recommendation 2: Adapt strategies to attract and retain staff to address sector shortages

The shortage of education and care staff is compromising service provision putting at risk quality learning for children. We need state and national government investment to scale up successful strategies to attract and retain early childhood educators and teachers to the profession including:

- Scholarships and targeted training programs, including to build a diverse workforce and address rural and regional shortages;

- Financial incentives programs to take-up positions in hard to staff areas;
- Trial government funded retention payments for not-for-profits in critical locations; and
- Networks and mentor support.

Recommendation 3: Improve training

Partnerships between training providers and services can support improvements in the quality of training and work readiness of graduates. These need to be showcased, with guidance developed on how to build and sustain these partnerships. Further evidence is needed on what a quality placement looks like, and to ensure a feedback mechanism back to training providers and regulators exists where students on placement, or new recruits, do not meet quality standards.

Recommendation 4: Skilled migration

Skilled migration has a small but significant role to play. The early childhood education and care workforce needs to be reinstated onto the priority migration skilled occupation list, due to the significant shortages that exceed several other industries on the list.



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Australia's education and care sector is facing serious workforce shortages. There are compounding pressures on the sector including growing demand for places for children, such as with the expansion of three-year-old kindergarten, alongside declines in the number of enrolments in educator and teacher qualifications. Education and care services were deemed an 'essential service' during the pandemic enabling other essential workers, including health care workers to continue in their roles. Education and care services are considered vital as we move into the post-COVID economy.

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) and Community Child Care (CCC) have a combined membership of almost 3000 services providing long day care, preschool/ kindergarten and outside hours school care. Our members include community owned and managed services, early years management organisations and private providers employing well over 40,000 staff. Feedback from members indicated that workforce shortages are impacting services, that a lack of access to casual staff, and ability to attract and retain more permanent staff are impacting on services' capacity to meet community need for education and care.

This report provides a quantitative and qualitative examination of pressures on the workforce and their impact on services informed by a survey of our members. ACECQA's recently released ten-year workforce strategy recognises the urgency of the workforce challenge setting out a long-term plan to meet the shortfall. The findings of the survey support the ACECQA strategy, with a focus on key measures to accelerate the sector's capacity to attract, develop and retain our vital workforce.



RECENT EXAMINATIONS OF WORKFORCE ISSUES

There is a growing body of research, analysis and policy development about the education and care workforce in Australia, which provide a foundation for understanding the current workforce shortages, the scale of attrition and turnover, and factors which support attraction and retention.

Demand and Supply

Demand for education and care staff is increasing. Projections show that growth in the sector is expected to increase over the five years to November 2025, with employment expected to increase by around 16,000 educators (an 11% increase) and 8,000 teachers (a 17% increase) through to 2025, well above the national projected employment growth of 7.8% for all occupations (Education Services Australia, 2021). In Victoria alone, by 2029 the kindergarten reform is expected to create more than 6,000 new jobs requiring 4,000 teachers and 2,000 qualified educators (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2021).

Workforce shortages are most acute in rural areas, especially for regional and remote ECEC services with increasing numbers of services requiring waivers due to their inability to recruit suitably qualified staff (Jackson, 2020).

At the same time that there is growing demand, there is a decline in the number of enrolments in both educator and teacher approved training courses. In addition, early childhood graduates are much more likely to choose to work in schools than early childhood settings (Australian Children's Education and Care Authority, 2021). With both growing demand and decreasing supply of new graduates, the sector is facing urgent workforce challenges.

Attrition and Turnover

There are also significant pressures on the education and care workforce which drive attrition. A transnational 2021 survey exploring educators' work that included responses from 50 Australian educators, found that 73 per cent of educators wish to leave the sector in the next five years (Rogers, 2021). The findings echo similar results from the United Workers Union report which found that 37 per cent of educators do not plan to stay in the sector long-term, and of those who plan to leave, 74 per cent plan to leave in the next three years (United Workers Union, 2021). The report identified the top three reasons educators want to leave the sector are:

- Excessive workload and insufficient time to provide quality early childhood education and care (73 per cent)
- Low pay (63 per cent); and
- Feeling undervalued (47 per cent).

The mismatch between the expectations of working in the sector and the reality of the workload is also a major contributor to workforce churn and to worker burnout (Jackson, 2020; Rogers, 2021).

Attraction and retention

Thorpe et al (2020) argue that the agenda for quality improvement in early childhood education and care has driven policies targeting workforce professionalisation. Increased training and accountability have been required, but without commensurate remuneration. They found that 22 per cent of staff intend to exit the sector, but that supportive workplaces increased intention to stay. They argue that long term sustainability in the sector should be addressed by appropriate reward of professionalisation. Low wages are known to be a key factor affecting the ECEC workforce supply (Jackson, 2020).

In 2021, the Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) longitudinal study *Trends in Community Children's Services Survey* found that two thirds of educators have been in the same not for profit service for over 3 years; compared to just one-third for the sector as a whole. Higher retention can be attributed to a long-term trend of paying staff above the Award (65 to 73 per cent between 2014 to 2021) and investing in professional development (74 per cent). The quality ratings of community-managed services are also higher (ACCS, 2021).

The negative stigma of the high workload demands needs to be addressed through continuous promotion of the benefits of the sector, to encourage people to choose careers in early childhood education (United Workers Union, 2021). Qualification requirements have also increased the threshold costs and barriers to entry into ECEC careers and therefore, several levers such as scholarships, more placement opportunities and entry pathways for migrant educators should be made more available. The disjointed transition between graduation into employment needs to be tackled through providing additional support, to ensure graduates are fully enticed into the childcare sector (Jackson, 2020).

A National Workforce Strategy

ACECQA's Ten Year Workforce Strategy (Education Services Australia, 2021), grounded in extensive consultations and review of evidence, sets short, medium and long-term goals to address the challenges facing the ECEC workforce. Priority actions centre around five themes: Professional recognition; attraction and retention; leadership and capability; educator wellbeing; qualifications; and pathways and data and evidence. The strategy recognises that collaboration across governments, service providers, peaks, education and training providers, educators and teachers and representative bodies is required to effect sustainable change.



WORKFORCE SURVEY

About This Survey

ELAA, CCC and CELA collaborated on a joint workforce survey of our members to understand the extent to which workforce shortages are impacting this segment of the education and care sector.

The survey asked about staff turnover, the number of positions services had tried to recruit between January and June in 2021, the number of unfilled positions, and strategies used to attract and retain staff. The impact of staff shortages on service provision was also examined.

The survey was conducted in the month of July 2021 and was promoted by CELA, CCC and ELAA via their respective e-newsletters, social media and websites.

Respondents

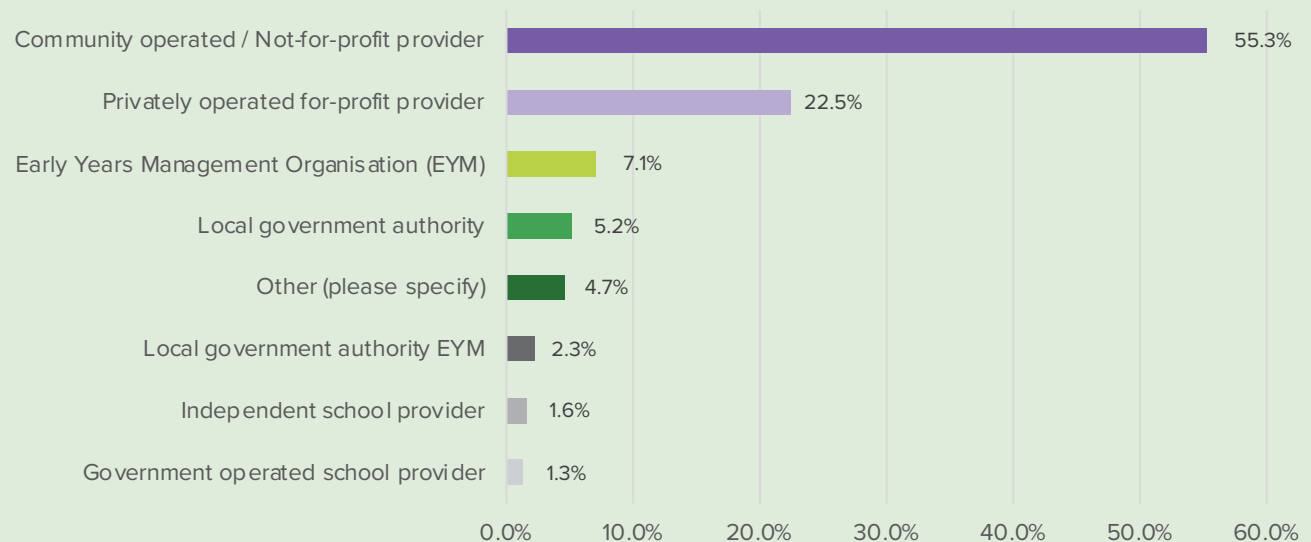
From the total of 747 responses were received, 38.7% were from New South Wales and 45.9% were from Victoria and representing conservatively over 3,300 service sites (Appendix 1, Tables 1 and 2). The lower number of responses from NSW may have been due to the impact of the pandemic during the collection period. In NSW a COVID-19 outbreak commenced in 16 June and the state was impacted for the full data collection period while Victoria experienced 12 days of lockdown.

Management Type

The overall breakdown of respondents by management type is shown below in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Responses by management type



Where Victorian responses were much more likely to be from community operated/not for profit providers (58.1%) or early years management organisations (EYMs) (14.5%), New South Wales had slightly less community operated services (52.8%) and relatively more privately operated for-profit providers in its mix of responses, with this segment representing just over one-third of its responses (Appendix 1, Figure 1).

When compared with all services registered by ACECQA, the sample overall is skewed towards community operated/not-for-profit providers, reflecting the mix of membership from ELAA, CELA and CCC (Appendix 1, Table 3)

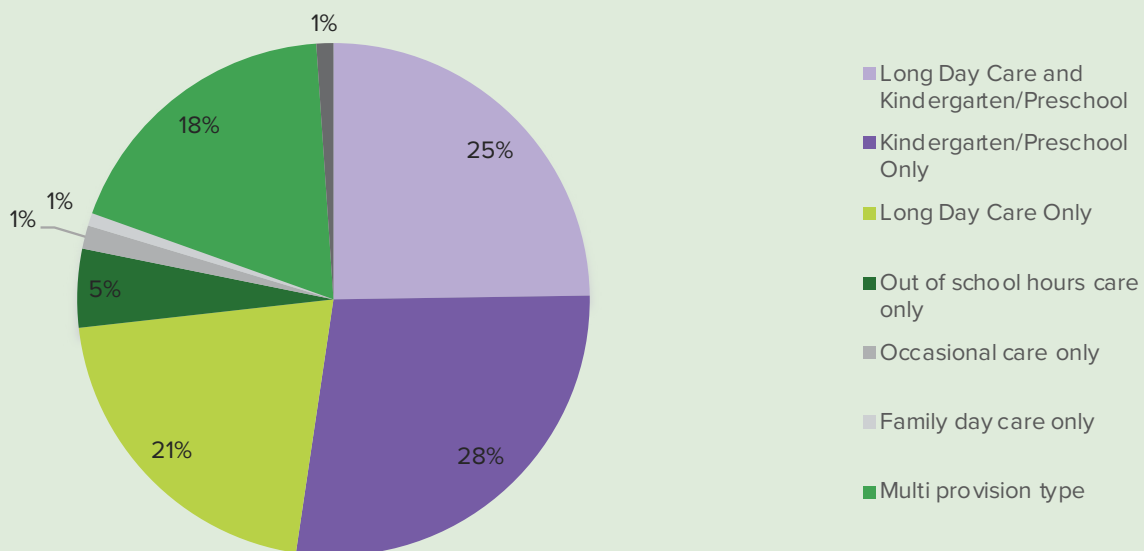
Service offering

The majority of survey responses were from long day care or kindergarten/preschool services. More than 25 percent of respondents offered kindergarten/preschool and about 20 percent offered long day care while an additional 24.8 percent provided both long day care and a kindergarten/preschool program (Figure 2 and Appendix 1, Table 4).

Undertaking a comparison to national data on Approved Providers from ACECQA, the margin of error for responses from long day care and preschool/kindergarten was +/-4.42% and +/-4.11% respectively with a 95% confidence interval. Responses from family day care and to a lesser extent, outside school hours care should be interpreted with more caution, given the high margin of error. (Appendix 1, Table 3)

Figure 2

Responses by type of provision

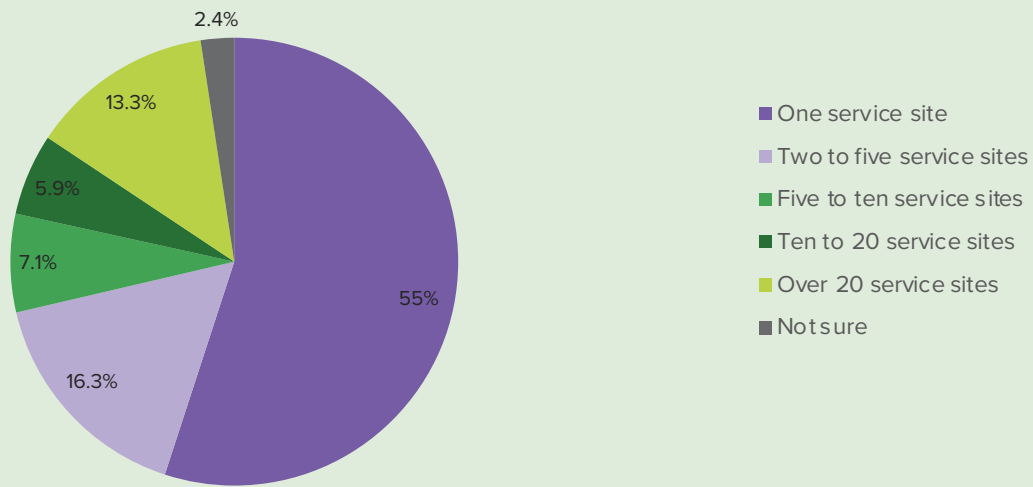


Number of service sites

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Figure 3

Responses by number of service sites



Staff Turnover

Changes in staff turnover

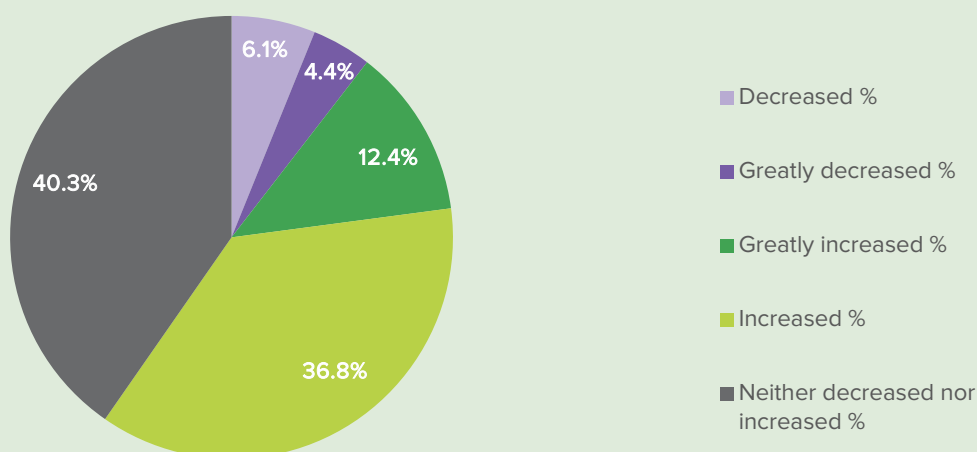
Staff turnover increased or greatly increased in nearly half of all services. The half of respondents which did not experience higher staff turnover may have been due to additional government funding of preschool services in Victoria, Job Keeper last year or as Thorpe and others (2020) found in their research, supportive workplaces with well-established teams.

The cost of high staff turnover and attrition is to children’s learning and development, which depends on their relationships to educators. Turnover and attrition threaten to undermine the policy objectives of the quality improvement agenda.

“It takes time to build relationships with children and their families. When continuity of care is interrupted because of staff turnover, it is impossible to build this type of relationship. Not only children, but also their families, end up feeling insecure and anxious because of a lack of consistency and continuity of care. As a result, their wellbeing is compromised.”

Figure 4

Staff turnover since the pandemic

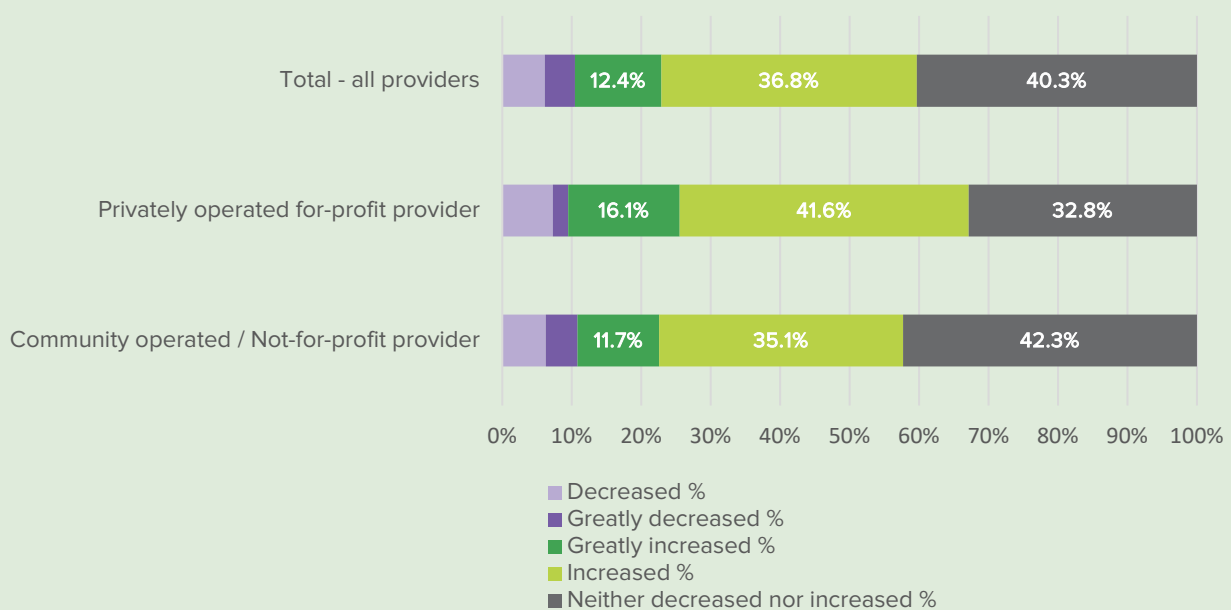


Management type and service offering

Workforce turnover was higher for privately-owned for-profit services, with 58 per cent of services with this management type reporting turnover had increased or greatly increased, compared to the average of 49 per cent. Local Government authority EYM had a very high percentage turnover of 70 per cent. The reasons for this are unclear but may be related to the lack of eligibility for JobKeeper, however we note that Local Government authorities had a lower than average turnover. Community operated/not-for-profit providers were slightly lower than the average, with 47 per cent reporting staff turnover had increased or greatly increased.

Figure 5

Staff turnover since the pandemic – by management type



Long day care services reported a higher increase in turnover of staff (53.4 per cent) as compared to kindergarten/preschool (47.3 per cent for funded 3 or 4 year old) (Appendix 1, Figure 2).

What has impacted staff turnover?

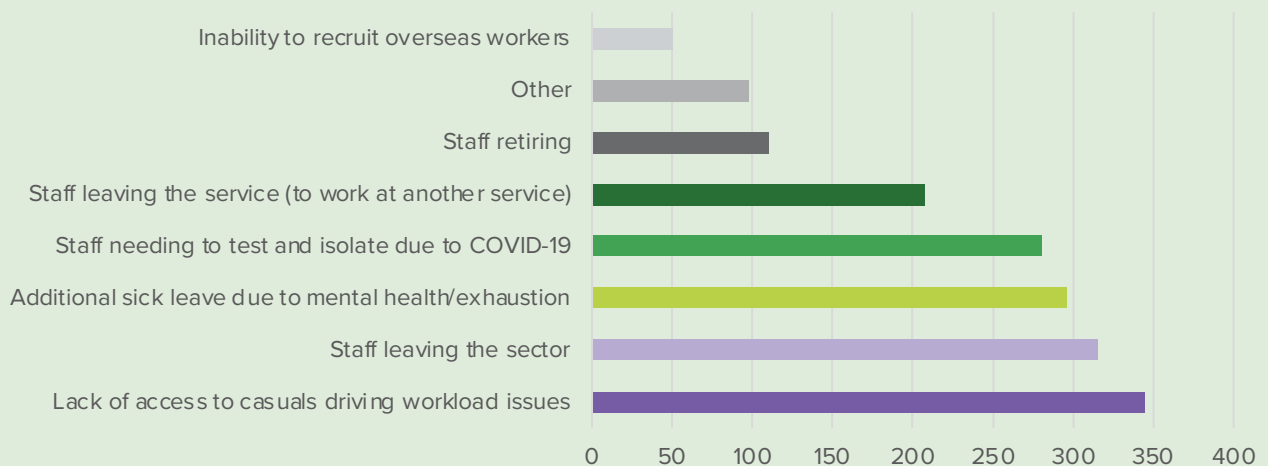
The largest factors impacting on staff turnover and shortages were lack of access to casual staff (n=344) and staff leaving the sector (n=315) (Figure 6).

People seem to be leaving our profession due to unrealistic demands for terrible pay. I have been in this profession for 30 years & have been considering leaving due to burnout following A&R.

The impacts of COVID-19 are significant, with many services highlighting additional sick leave due to mental health/exhaustion (n=296) and that needing to test and isolate due to COVID19 (n=280) was exacerbating shortages. With Victoria and New South Wales progressively re-opening these factors have not diminished. With early childhood education and care set to become the largest sites where unvaccinated people regularly mingle, the impact of COVID-19 on ECEC is likely to increase (De Courten et al, 2021).

Figure 6

Factors impacting on increased staff turnover by number of respondents



Factors Supporting Retention

While many of the comments and much of the quantitative data showed a workforce in crisis, those services which had well established teams, providing above Award pay and better conditions commented that were insulated from the impact of workforce shortages.

“We are reasonably successful at retaining staff, particularly permanent part-time staff. However, this is largely due to paying vastly above award to what might resemble a liveable wage for this part of Sydney. We also pay casuals at higher rates than any other service we are aware of, this would not be a sustainable model across a multi-site organisation or an organisation that operated in an area of lower density living/high OOSH demand.”

It is not exclusively about wages that contribute to attracting and retaining staff, as this comment highlights:

“Flexibility and supporting work/life balance seems to make the biggest difference to finding/retaining good people.”

Working conditions are also crucial to above award pay and a sense of job satisfaction.

“We have a team that has been at the centre for many years. Our staff turnover is low. We pay above award. We have great educator to child ratios which means educators can provide quality care and education. Educators are also provided with sufficient time off the floor to complete documentation/meet with parents etc. I believe educators don't realise there are centres like ours "out there". I feel that many are leaving the industry because they are stressed and overwhelmed.

Recruitment and Vacancies

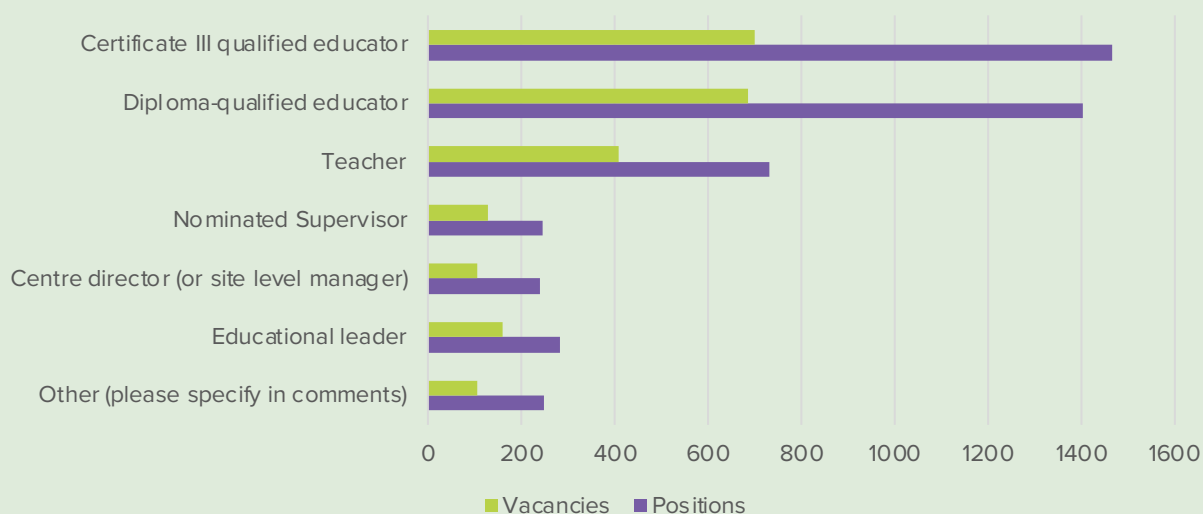
The survey asked respondents to identify the number and type of positions they sought to recruit in the first six months of 2021 and the resulting

vacancies. Respondents selected the number of positions across a range of values (Appendix 1, Tables 5 and 6).

Nearly half of all vacancies remained unfilled in early 2021. Services reported that over 4,500 vacancies (minimum) had been advertised in the first six months of 2021 (Appendix 1, Table 7). The most common position advertised was at the certificate III level and the diploma level which each had over 1400 vacancies advertised. Vacancies for teachers were high at over 700 vacancies. Figure 7 comparing the number of positions advertised and unfilled positions is based on the lower end of the range.

Figure 7

Comparison of minimum number of advertised positions and resulting vacancies



Reasons services gave for being unable to fill vacancies include a lack of applicants, poor quality of training and a lack of cultural fit.

“We have found that the standard of qualifications and competency of prospective employees has dramatically dropped, for example trained diploma educators who are illiterate, cannot do tasks that are essential for the position e.g. observations, cannot communicate to children in English, or have diploma trained educators applying for an early childhood teacher roles.”

Rural factors are also part of the story. Living in rural and remote communities makes the workforce challenges more acute, with a shortage of qualified education and care staff as well as other staff, such as allied health

“We have found that distance/travel are major issues faced by people working at our service, and some form of travel concession (which budget-wise we are unable to provide) would go a long way in assisting with staff being able to continue with our service.”

Certificate III and diploma qualified educator positions had the greatest number of vacancies being at a minimum of more than 680 positions. One of the key issues for services is the quality of available applicants.

“CERT III educators are available, however, they have proven to NOT have

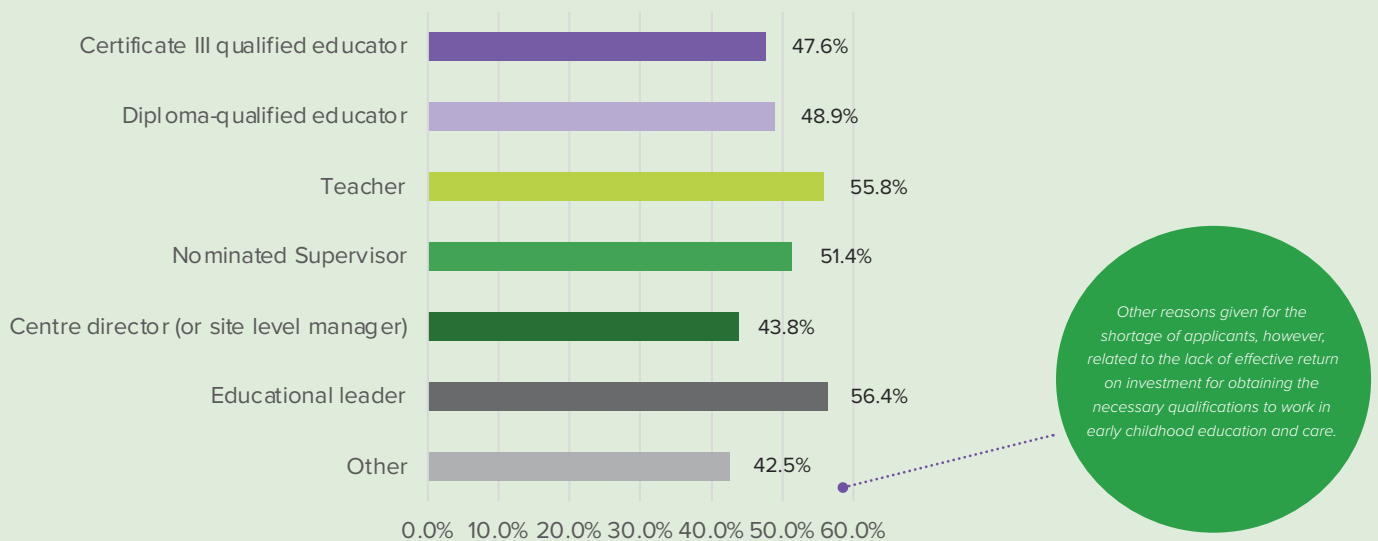
a reasonable knowledge of developmental stages, general knowledge of the EYLF and have a limited understanding and practice of work ethic and reliability.”

Given it only takes between 6-12 months to become a qualified certificate III educator it would seem that this demand could be met in a short space of time with the right levers in place.

Examining the data based on the minimum of the range, the survey results show the challenges for services in recruitment with vacancies of over 40 percent for all positions advertised. Educational leaders, teachers and nominated supervisors were the most difficult to recruit with 56.4%, 55.8% and 51.4% of positions sought remaining vacant respectively (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Vacancies as a percentage of positions advertised



“As we know those that work in childcare or teaching love children and seeing them thrive. The industry is one of the lowest paid with the expectation of basic requirements of a Cert 3, First Aid & Blue Card/WWCC. Plus with the new roll out of National Accreditation & Training, those entering the industry have only 1 option to obtain their Cert 3 and then study the Diploma if they want to apply for higher positions. Who would want to work in a minimum paying job pay \$3000-5000 for full time study to obtain a Cert 3. Then if they have higher aspirations they then have to study again whilst working full time and out lay another \$5,000-\$10,000 from a minimum paying job. There is little to no incentive for people to want to work in the Childcare industry, if the national award was similar to teaching, study was supported by Tafe/Uni/Gov and the government supported families and essential small businesses there may be more interest and up take of positions in the childcare industry.”

It was also observed that unfilled positions take a toll on the residual workforce and ability to provide services.

"We have never before had so much difficulty recruiting educators. We have a good reputation and usually have multiple applicants. Since June last year we have hardly any applicants and our educators are working harder than ever to provide children with consistent high quality care but the strain of not being able to recruit is showing. We are having increased absences for a variety of reason that further impacts on the other educators."

Changes to Service Operations Due to Staff Shortages

With such high vacancies it is difficult to understand how services have continued to operate. The answer may reside in the fact that many community services usually operate above ratio to meet the needs of their children and community, such as where they have higher percentage of enrolments of children with a delay or disability, and ensure quality.

"Sometimes it is only because community owned services choose to staff above ratio, that they have been able to operate on some days when a number of staff have called in sick."

Some may have waivers in place and anecdotally we understand that others may delay requesting a waiver due to concerns about compromising their quality rating, a myth which regulators are working to debunk.

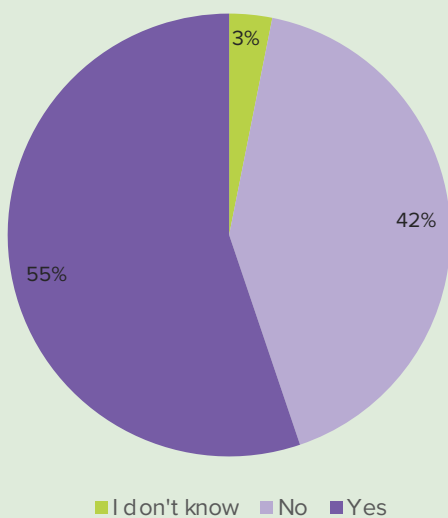
With staff spending more time on the floor, the service impacts are real, with less time available for planning, seeking additional funding or support for children in need, undertaking outreach or community engagement or implementing quality improvements.

Changes to service delivery

Over half of all services have made changes to service delivery to respond to the staff shortages (Figure 10) – in addition to reducing quality by dropping back to at ratio delivery, and staff working additional hours.

Figure 9

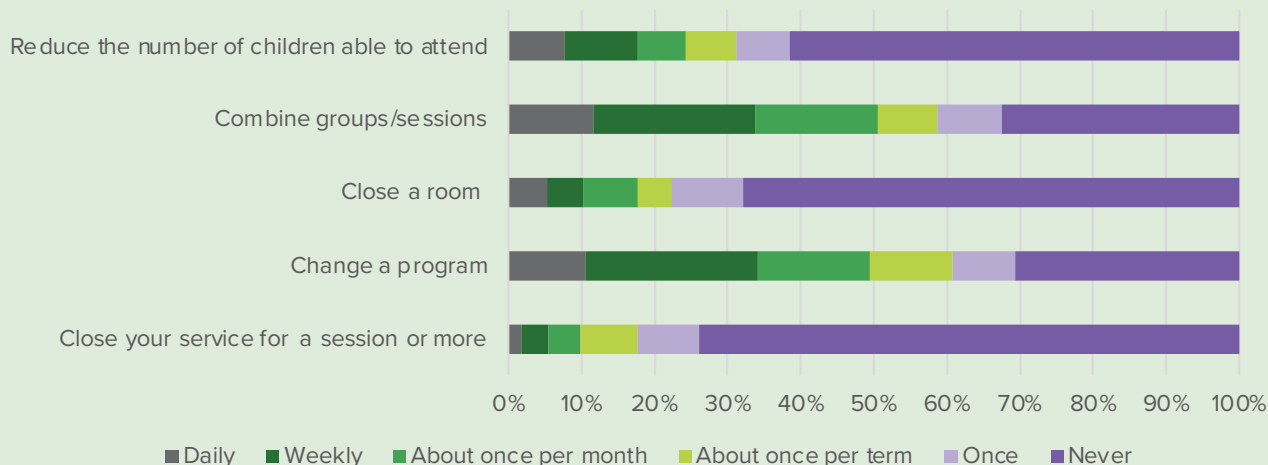
Needed to make changes to service delivery due to shortage of staff



The survey asked respondents (n=303) about strategies they used in response to staff shortages (Appendix 1, Figure 4). Over a third of services changed programs or combined groups on a daily or weekly basis. More concerningly almost a quarter of services had reduced the number of children attending on a monthly basis. Around one in five services had closed a room or service at least once a term.

Figure 10

Frequency of changes made to service provision due to staff shortages



Type of provision impacted on likelihood of needing to change service delivery due to shortages of staff, with 62.6 per cent of long day care respondents saying they had to make changes to service delivery compared with just 50.3 per cent of funded 4-year-old preschool (Appendix 1, Figure 3).

The responses show that it is clear that the staff shortages ACECQA identified as emerging in its Ten Year Workforce Strategy are already impacting many services, and their capacity to provide education and care to children.

“Although this council is a direct provider of only 2 occasional care services, we work with >20 preschools and LDC services who operate out of council facilities. We are hearing consistently that services are having great difficulty filling Diploma level positions and booking relief staff. Services that very rarely use agencies are now needing to regularly and often the agencies have no staff available. With no relief staff available they are forced to operate on bare minimum ratios which they feel puts pressure on staff present and compromises quality. We know of 2 preschools that have closed and cancelled sessions for a day at very short notice because they have been unable to source a cert III or dip qualified staff member.”

Rural areas have also had to close services due to staff shortages.

“Being in a regional-rural area, and being a not-for-profit service, we have had extreme difficulties in finding and retaining great staff over the last year, resulting in several service closures to the great inconvenience of everyone involved with our preschool.”

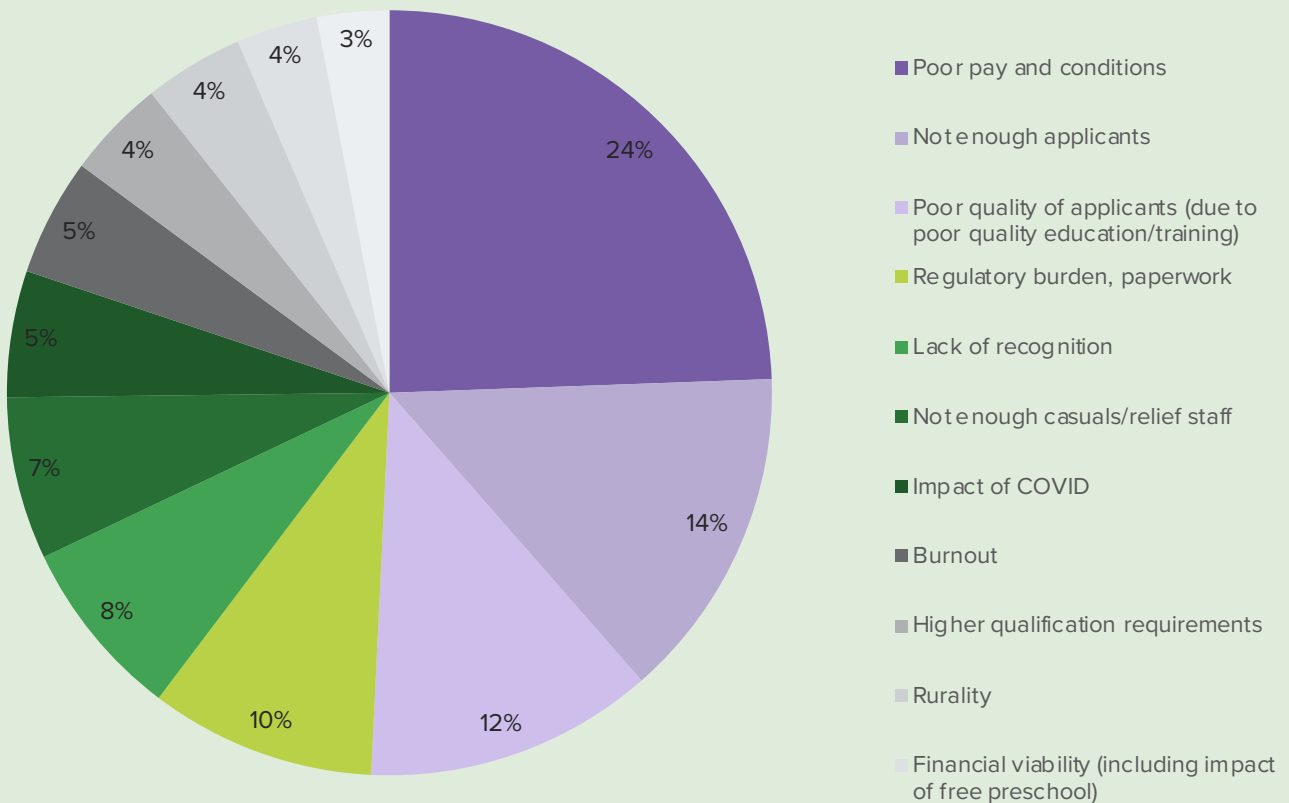
Overview of Qualitative Feedback

One third of survey respondents took the opportunity to respond to the question “Please add any final comments around any additional challenges you have or your suggestions for solutions to workforce challenges.” The very high number of responses to this question in itself highlights the deep frustration of those working in the education and care sector.

The most frequently raised issue contributing to workforce issues was poor pay and conditions (24 per cent). This in turn led to next most frequently made comment, that there are not enough applicants for jobs (14 per cent). The poor quality of job applicants, a result of poor quality qualifications, was the next most cited issue, at (12 per cent).

Figure 11

Analysis of qualitative commentary





THE WAY
FORWARD

Finding and retaining quality staff is a challenge faced by many services. High vacancy rates, despite the prevalence of the use of above award pay to attract staff illustrates the enormous challenge for the sector.

However, change is possible. Targeted funding and a commitment to growing the workforce will bear rewards. The ACECQA Workforce Strategy provides a path forward if the strategies it articulates are funded, implemented and findings shared and scaled. Investment is needed at all levels of government, with a coordinated strategy that ensures we invest in, implement and evaluate what works. This includes priority investment in the below strategies.

Recommendation 1: Improve pay and conditions of sector employees

One of the key actions of the ACECQA workforce strategy is to investigate options to improve wages and conditions. We support improving pay and conditions as a matter of urgency. The recently re-negotiated Victorian Early Childhood Teacher and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) has terms and conditions significantly more beneficial than the modern awards and many other relevant agreements in the sector. It shows it is possible to have pay parity with the school. Additional elements of this agreement include:

- Superior leave entitlements, including paid parental leave, personal leave and family and domestic violence leave
- Professional development, organisational days and planning time
- Access to an employee assistance program providing confidential counselling to discuss personal or work-related issues.

Extending these benefits to all teachers and educators, considering different ECEC delivery settings, would make significant inroads into the sector's workforce challenges, and requires additional government investment. The investment needs to be tied to wage increases, including the recent Fair Work wage adjustment.

Indications are that highly qualified staff are more common in affluent communities suggesting that families' ability to pay affects the ability to attract higher-qualified and remunerated educators, while demand for teachers and educators is highest in less affluent areas (Jackson, 2018). It is critical that children's access to education and care are not impacted by improved conditions for staff through increased fees for parents.

Investment from government is needed that is tied to wage increases, including the recent Fair Work wage adjustment. Further, governments should investigate an industrial relations instrument that can fund professional wages and conditions for early childhood education and care staff across settings.

Recommendation 2: Adapt strategies to attract and retain staff to address sector shortages

The shortage of staff of all levels of qualification is compromising service provision putting at risk quality learning for children. We need state and

national government investment to scale up successful strategies to attract and retain early childhood educators and teachers to the profession including:

- Scholarships and targeted training programs, including to build a diverse workforce and address rural and regional shortages;
- Financial incentives programs to take-up or retain positions in hard to staff areas;
- Trial government funded retention payments for not-for-profits in critical locations;
- Networks and mentor support.

A range of strategies and approaches is needed to respond to immediate, short-term and long-term demands of certificate III and diploma educators in particular.

Unis, TAFEs and RTOs could do more to encourage students to gain experience while completing their studies. TAFES and RTOs should send out information about how to obtain work whilst studying. Even primary school teachers would benefit as it is all be relative knowledge for their studies.

There are also learnings to be gained from looking at other examples of workforce crises such as in the healthcare sector through the pandemic.

Housing has proven to be a challenge including in some rural areas. Flexible tailored solutions are needed to address local barriers.

Case study: Growing your own workforce

Deniliquin is a regional town located two and a half hours from Albury and 8 hours from Sydney. The Deniliquin Children's Service is essential for the town, each week educating and caring for 250 children, with 55 educational and support staff offering long day care, preschool and mobile services, as well as a toy library.

In 2018 the service identified that recruitment is a key risk for the organisation and developed a "Grow your own" strategy. The strategy has a number of elements including school-based traineeships, and developing the capacity and qualifications of its existing workforce through:

- supporting Diploma qualified educators to undertake their Bachelor Degrees, including paid study leave off the floor for 3 hours per week
- helping educators apply for NSW Department of Education scholarships
- paying the upfront costs of tuition which educators can pay back to the service over time.

More recently the service has recently reached out, in partnership with schools, for assistance from their local council with the aim of investigating housing options and other incentives to attract qualified educators and teachers to the town.

Whilst the strategy incurs significant costs to the service, the investment is bearing dividends, with an upskilled quality workforce.

Recommendation 3: Improve training

The third most common issue raised in survey comments related to the quality of graduates, who often lack the knowledge and skills to adequately perform the role. Some felt that better connections between education and training providers and industry would be useful, in addition to providing part-time/casual work and attract students studying relevant qualifications.

Partnerships between training providers and services can support improvements in the quality of training and work readiness of graduates. These need to be showcased, with guidance developed on how to build and sustain these partnerships. Further evidence is needed on what a quality placement looks like, and to ensure a feedback mechanism back to training providers and regulators exists where students on placement, or new recruits, do not meet quality standards.

Of particular note is qualifications and pathways – Microcredentials to support staff to collect small ‘units’ of learning which can ultimately be bundled into qualifications or skills sets may support career pathways as well as meeting local needs. For example, a diploma qualified educator may complete a series of microcredentials relating to working with neurologically atypical children. This may ultimately contribute to the beginning of a Bachelor or Associate Degree, and strengthens the capacity of the educator and the preschool to meet the needs of children with these characteristics.

Another idea is to separate out assessment from delivery of training to remove any conflict of interest. One of the reasons why Year 12 certificates have relatively high levels of credibility in comparison with other qualifications and credentials is due to the fact that schools are the providers of education but not the final assessors – this is conducted by a separate organisation and results benchmarked against other providers of education. A pilot where an expert organisation assesses graduates in the workplace before finally issuing staff with a ‘work ready’ assessment could be trialled.

Effective public investment in our post-compulsory education and training sector will boost the quality of education and care graduates entering the workforce and support retention ensuring the value of that investment

Mentoring program delivers quality early career teacher experiences

Eureka Community Kindergarten Association (ECKA) is an early years management organisation with 28 service sites in regional Victoria.

ECKA has developed a multi-pronged approach to assist provisionally registered teachers to achieve full registration and to maximise the learning outcomes of this important career transition. A trained mentor, usually an educational leader is matched to each provisional teacher. A panel of mentors supports the teacher with the development of the inquiry project and the mentor provides guidance to ensure that the inquiry project is SMART. The mentor also observes the provisional teacher’s practice and provides a written report on their insights.

To help ensure that provisional teachers have exposure to a range of programs and experiences as well as the chance to build professional networks, they are given opportunity to visit a minimum of three other kindergartens.

Staff at ECKA believe that this well-rounded and structured approach contributes to a deepening of the quality of education at their service as well as affording career development opportunities for those involved.

Recommendation 4: Skilled migration

Skilled migration has a small but significant role to play. This year the skilled migration list had another priority occupations added to the list. Occupations on the list range from CEO's and managing directors which are barely in shortage to veterinarians with a projected increase of 2200 staff by 2025. Both of these are dwarfed by the need for 8000 early childhood teachers and 13,300 educators by 2025. Currently the early childhood education and care workforce is not on the priority migration skilled occupation list, despite significant shortages that exceed several other industries on the list.

We cannot educate enough teachers in time to plug this gap with less than half of the 2200 early childhood education teacher graduates going on to work in early childhood each year.

The education and care workforce needs to be added to the list of job categories on the Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List as another means of addressing the critical sector shortages.



CONCLUSION

Conclusion

ACECQA's national workforce plan must be funded to ensure there is a stable and well-qualified workforce available to educate and care for our youngest Australians. With 50 per cent of advertised positions going unfilled, the impacts of a shortage of teachers and educators is already affecting program delivery and participation.

Whilst the plan encapsulates a range of short, medium and long-term strategies, based on our survey responses and feedback from members we support four immediate priorities. Firstly, improved pay and conditions will increase retention and attraction to the sector. Secondly, innovations used to address shortages in early childhood teacher workforce and in other sectors should be applied to address the high demand for staff. Thirdly, partnerships between sector and training providers must be established and built on to drive improved workforce readiness. Finally, skilled migration has a role to play as a means of contributing to meeting immediate workforce demands.

As we move into a post-COVID economy, optimal rates of female participation in the workforce will not occur without a high quality and reliable source of education and care for children to access. However, this is about far more than the economy and gender equity, it is about ensuring all children get the very best start in life. A quality available education and care workforce will support children's learning at the most critical stage of their development and have lasting impacts on them as adults and contribute to Australia's long-term future.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY RESPONSES

Nature of Respondents

Table 1

Responses by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Number	%
TOTAL	747	99.9%
Victoria only	343	45.9%
NSW only	289	38.7%
Multiple states	22	2.9%
Other	92	12.4%
Unknown	1	0.1%

Table 2

Survey responses by number of services and service sites

Number of Services	Number	Number of service sites (erring on lowest number in range)
GRAND TOTAL	747	3358
One service site	411	411
Two to five service sites	122	244
Five to ten service sites	53	265
Ten to twenty service sites	44	440
Over twenty service sites	99	1980
Not sure	18	18

Figure 1

Responses by Management Type and Jurisdiction

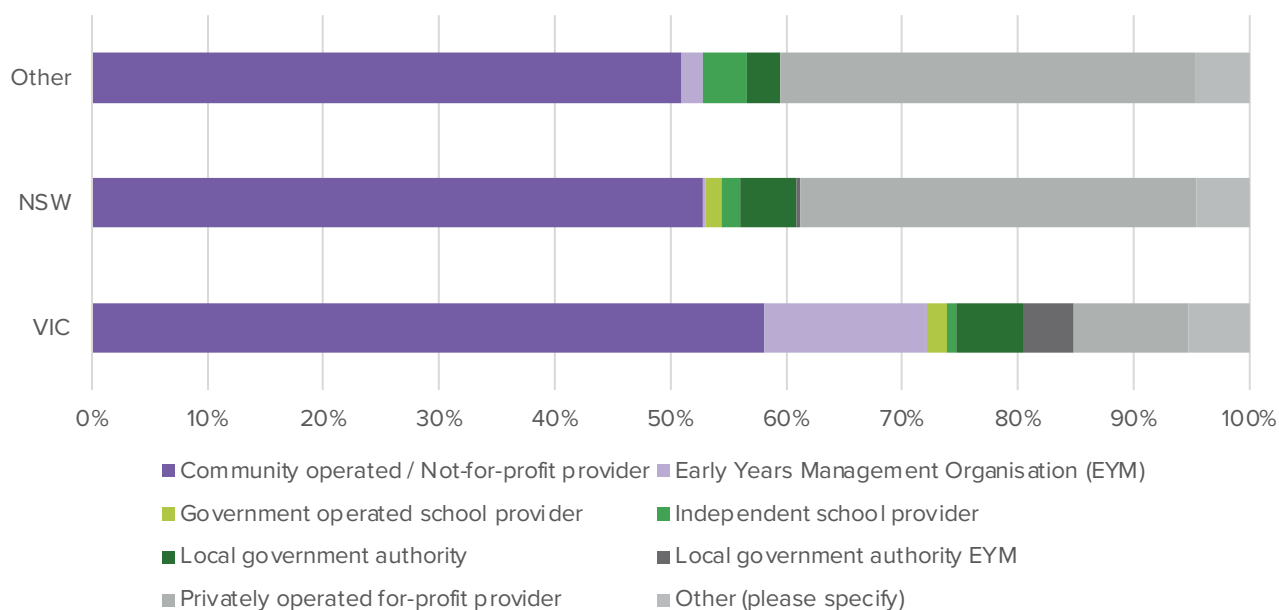


Table 3

Provision Type and Estimated Margin of Error compared to ACECQA data

Reflecting the balance of membership of CELA, ELAA and CCC, most responses were from long day care or kindergarten/preschool services. Undertaking a comparison to national data on Approved Providers from ACECQA, the margin of error for responses from Long Day Care and Preschool/Kindergarten with a 95% confidence interval was +/-4.42% and +/-4.11% respectively. Responses from Family Day Care and to a lesser extent, Outside School Hours Care should be interpreted with more caution, given the high margin of error.

Number of Services	ACECQA National	Survey sample	Margin of Error
Family Day Care	488	32	+/-16.74%
Long Day Care	8332	465	+/-4.42%
Preschool/Kindergarten	3027	479	+/-4.11%
Outside School Hours Care	4601	132	+/-8.41%
GRAND TOTAL	16448	1108	+/-2.84%

Provision Type

In terms of service provision, 27.6 per cent offered kindergarten/preschool exclusively, 24.8 per cent offered both long day care and a kindergarten/preschool program, while 20.9 per cent offered long day care exclusively. 19.5 per cent offered multiple types of provision beyond kindergarten/preschool and long day care.

Table 4

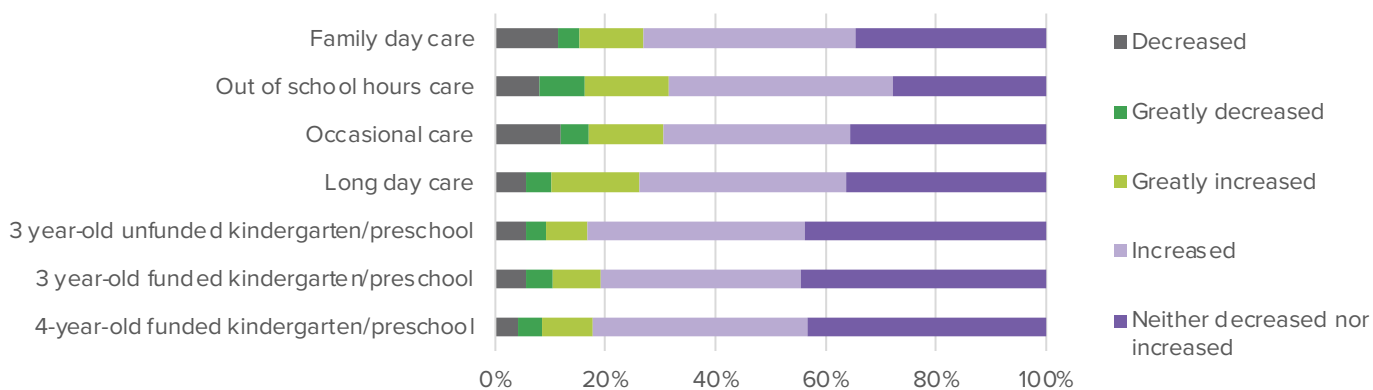
Responses by type of provision

Provision Type	Number	%
Long Day Care and Kindergarten/Preschool	185	2.4%
Kindergarten/Preschool Only	206	27.6%
Long Day Care Only	156	20.9%
Out of school hours care only	37	5.0%
Occasional care only	11	1.5%
Family day care only	6	0.8%
Multi provision type	146	19.5%
TOTAL	747	100.1%

Staff Turnover

Figure 2

Change in staff turnover since pandemic began – by service offering



Recruitment and Vacancies

Table 5

Positions advertised

Tried to recruit - min range	1-5 positions vacant	6-10 positions vacant	11-15 positions vacant	16-20 positions vacant	21+	Total
Certificate III qualified educator	355	258	220	192	441	1466
Diploma-qualified educator	383	252	231	96	441	1403
Teacher	294	132	88	112	105	731
Educational leader	133	42	33	32	42	282
Centre director (or site level manager)	116	66	0	16	42	240
Nominated Supervisor	110	66	0	48	21	245
Other (please specify in comments)	78	36	33	16	84	247
GRAND TOTAL						4614

Table 6

Vacant positions

Unable to fill - min range	1-5 positions vacant	6-10 positions vacant	11-15 positions vacant	16-20 positions vacant	21+	Total
Certificate III qualified educator	261	120	132	80	105	698
Diploma-qualified educator	277	108	132	64	105	686
Teacher	162	102	44	16	84	408
Educational leader	65	24	33	16	21	159
Centre director (or site level manager)	60	18	11	16	0	105
Nominated Supervisor	58	30	22	16	0	126
Other (please specify in comments)	42	36	11	16	0	105
GRAND TOTAL						2287

Table 7

Positions and Residual Vacancies

Positions and Residual Vacancies	Positions	Vacancies
Other (please specify in comments)	247	105
Educational leader	282	159
Centre director (or site level manager)	240	105
Nominated Supervisor	245	126
Teacher	731	408
Diploma-qualified educator	1403	686
Certificate III qualified educator	1466	698
GRAND TOTAL	4614	2287

Service Operations

Figure 3

Needed to make changes to program due to staff shortage – by service type

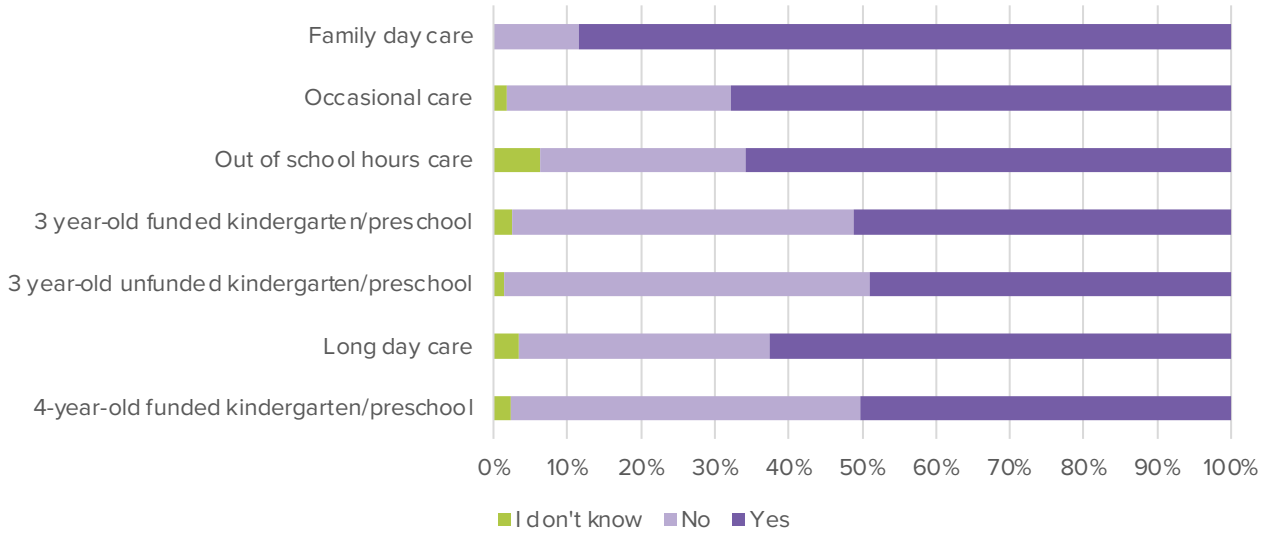


Figure 4

Types of changes made due to staff shortages

