

Money, love and identity: Initial findings from the National ECEC Workforce Study ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

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 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.

This report provides participants and other interested parties with a summary of the initial findings from the ECEC Workforce Study shared at a 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: 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 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 not 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).

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

Tags: childcare workforce ^[4]

retention ^[5]

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Links

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