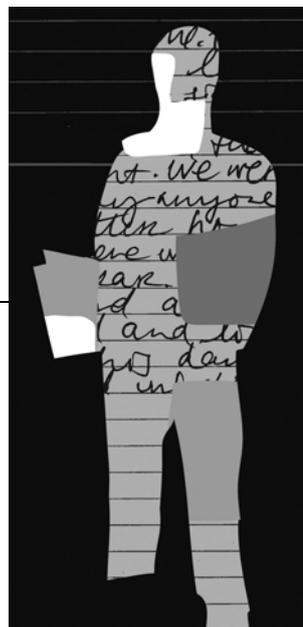


Chapter 5

Early childhood sector



Although the Committee has focused its inquiry on teachers in Victorian schools, it is aware that there are many teachers in Victoria who do not work in the school sector. In particular, recent reforms in Victoria have led to increasing recognition of teacher professionalism in early childhood education. In August 2007, the Office for Children was moved from the Department of Human Services to the newly-formed Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This represented the first of a series of major Victorian Government initiatives to better integrate teaching and learning in early childhood and primary schooling. Detailed policies in this area are described in the Department's policy statement, *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, released in September 2008.

The growing integration of early childhood and school education in Victoria led the Committee to address early childhood teaching as part of the inquiry. At the same time, recent reforms have also highlighted a need for closer integration between early childhood education and child care services. For this reason, the Committee's investigations with regard to the early childhood sector have also extended to child care professionals, including those who may not have been traditionally recognised as having teaching roles. Research has shown that the early years of a child's life are crucial for building firm foundations to support their learning throughout their formal schooling, and beyond.⁸⁰³ The Committee believes that all professionals who interact with children in education and care settings have a critical role to play in supporting this development.

Policy context

The Committee found that the regulatory framework for developing professional expertise in the early childhood workforce is more complex than for the school teaching profession, due the wide variety of services that operate in the sector. Children younger than school age may attend a range of services, which differ widely in their hours and programs. These include education services such as kindergartens and preschools, child care services such as long day care, family day care or occasional care, and intervention programs for children with special learning needs.

⁸⁰³ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) 2008, *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper*, DEECD, Melbourne, p. 5.

Most Victorian children attend kindergarten for either one or two years prior to starting school, with a 94 per cent kindergarten participation rate reported in 2008.⁸⁰⁴ For children in child care, the Committee heard that working patterns for parents mean that long day care is currently the most common arrangement.⁸⁰⁵ Many long day care centres also offer the opportunity for children to attend sessional kindergarten programs, either co-located or off-site.

As well as differing in their programs, early childhood education and care services differ in their governance structures. Most kindergartens in Victoria are managed by volunteer parent committees, local government, cluster managers, independent schools, or as part of a long day care facility.⁸⁰⁶ In contrast, the Committee heard that around two-thirds of child care providers in Victoria are commercially operated.⁸⁰⁷

Recent policy developments in Victoria and at a national level have sought to reduce the boundaries between early childhood education and care. The Australian Government has committed to ensuring that all four-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of teacher-led preschool per week by 2013.⁸⁰⁸ Given that long day care is an increasingly popular model for four-year-old care, better integration between kindergartens and child care facilities will be necessary to improve children's access to both education and care services.⁸⁰⁹ The Victorian Government has also committed to better integrating early childhood education and care, to ensure that children in care have access to high-quality educational services.⁸¹⁰

The Committee heard that this closer integration of services for Victorian children will change the way that early childhood professionals work and interact. Not only will it lessen the divide between early childhood teachers and teachers in schools, it will also open up opportunities for collaboration between early childhood professionals from a range of backgrounds and services. The Committee found that these changes have profound implications for professional learning policies for the Victorian early childhood workforce.

Professional learning policies for early childhood teachers

Different policies to support and develop professional expertise apply to different types of early childhood services. Kindergarten programs must be planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher with at least a three-year degree. While there is no professional regulatory authority for the sector comparable to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, provisions for professional learning for early childhood teachers are set out in their Multi-Employer Certified Agreement. The Committee found that professional learning expectations for Victorian kindergarten or preschool teachers set out in the Agreement are broadly similar to those for teachers in Victorian schools.

The Agreement requires early childhood teachers to commit to maintaining a Professional Development and Enhancement Plan (PDEP) as a condition of their annual incremental salary progression.⁸¹¹ As part of their PDEP, early childhood teachers must complete at least four days of professional learning annually. This minimum is applied on a pro-rata basis for part-time employees, reflecting the high proportion of part-time workers in the

⁸⁰⁴ M. Morand MLA, Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, 'Improved Access to Early Childhood Education for Victoria', *Media Release*, June 12, 2008.

⁸⁰⁵ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1.

⁸⁰⁶ Kindergarten Parents Victoria, *Kindergartens in Victoria*, KPV website, <<http://www.kpv.org.au/page/view/kindergartens-in-victoria-131/>>, accessed 12 November 2008.

⁸⁰⁷ Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 3.

⁸⁰⁸ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁰⁹ Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 9.

⁸¹⁰ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) 2008, *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, DEECD, Melbourne, p. 23.

⁸¹¹ *Early Childhood Educators' Multi-Employer Certified Agreement 2005*, pp. 14–15.

sector. The PDEP process requires early childhood teachers to plan and document their professional learning activities over the annual salary review period, and to maintain evidence of the professional learning activities they have undertaken. They then submit evidence of this participation to their employer to sign off, in order to be eligible for an incremental salary increase.⁸¹²

In light of the recent inclusion of early childhood development within the Education Department, the 2008 review of the Victorian Institute of Teaching suggested that the Institute should be given a role in registering and regulating Victorian early childhood teachers. The review commented that given teachers with an early childhood degree may teach children up to eight years of age, many teachers working in early childhood education are also already registered with the Institute. Furthermore, it noted that work on a system of registration for early childhood professionals has already been commenced by the former Office for Children. The review concluded that it would be logical to locate teacher registration at all levels within a single authority, thereby creating 'economies of scale'.⁸¹³

Some discussion around the potential introduction of registration for early childhood teachers arose in evidence to the inquiry. The president of Early Childhood Australia (Victoria) endorsed the establishment of a professional body to ensure that measures to support professionalism are available to the early childhood workforce. However, the president remained cautious about endorsing a role for the Victorian Institute of Teaching in this regard, noting that it does not currently have a close relationship with or understanding of the early childhood field.⁸¹⁴ Another participant commented that diverse organisational arrangements in the sector may make it more difficult to implement workforce regulations than in the school sector, where the majority of teachers are employed by the Department.⁸¹⁵

Perhaps most importantly, the Committee heard that closer regulatory alignment between early childhood teachers and school teachers may deepen divides within the early childhood workforce. As noted above, the early childhood workforce is comprised not only of early childhood teachers, but also of a high number of workers involved in the delivery of child care services. The Committee heard the view that prior campaigns to align early childhood teachers more closely with teachers in schools have contributed to a 'culture of distrust and lack of respect' between early childhood teachers and child care workers.⁸¹⁶ One participant commented that if the 'teacher component' of the early childhood workforce is separated out and aligned with the Victorian Institute of Teaching, there is a risk that this divide will be further entrenched.⁸¹⁷

Professional learning policies for other early childhood professionals

Evidence to the inquiry showed support for a more integrated approach between early childhood education and child care professionals. Ms Barbara Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association, commented that the 'outmoded notion that child care is fundamentally different from teaching' has been a barrier to effective professional learning

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸¹³ FJ and JM King and Associates 2008, *Review of the Victorian Institute of Teaching*, commissioned by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), DEECD, Melbourne, p. 33.

⁸¹⁴ Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 26.

⁸¹⁵ Ms R. Kinson, Education Consultant, Written Submission, July 2008, p.1.

⁸¹⁶ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 4.

⁸¹⁷ Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 26.

for early childhood professionals in the past.⁸¹⁸ Ms Romeril explained that her organisation takes a strong view that all adults who interact with young children are teaching them, and that young children will learn in every environment.⁸¹⁹ The Child Care Centres Association of Victoria also remarked that the widespread assumption that long day care centres are simply 'somewhere safe for parents to park their child' is incorrect. The Association asserted that in reality, long day care already functions more like an extended kindergarten program, with a strong focus on child development.⁸²⁰

However, early childhood education and care services differ in expectations for staff qualifications. The Committee heard that few long day care services currently employ degree-qualified early childhood teachers.⁸²¹ Long day care centres must employ at least one staff member with a minimum two-year diploma, and may also employ additional staff holding Certificate III in Children's Services or with no qualification at all. The Committee notes that in 2007, the proportion of staff employed in Victorian child care centres with a two-year tertiary qualification or higher was around 55 per cent.⁸²² Family day care providers are not currently required to hold a formal qualification.

A key aspect of the Victorian Government's strategy to better integrate child care and early childhood education is to raise the level of formal qualifications across the early childhood workforce.⁸²³ A recent OECD report on early childhood services found that degree-qualified teachers are accepted internationally as a key determinant of the quality of both early childhood education and care.⁸²⁴ This view was supported by several of the early childhood organisations that participated in the inquiry.⁸²⁵ The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has also noted that an emphasis on formal professional training may be a valuable way for the sector to attract and retain quality personnel.⁸²⁶

The Committee heard the view that the top priority for such policies should be raising qualifications for those already working in the sector, who have demonstrated their commitment to early childhood education and care.⁸²⁷ From 2008, the Victorian Government is providing support for practising early childhood professionals to upgrade from a diploma to an early childhood teaching degree, through the Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships for Pathway Students Scheme. The scheme provides 50 two-year scholarships for diploma holders currently working in long day care to upgrade to a degree, on the condition that they commit to working in a kindergarten program in a long day care centre for at least two years afterwards.⁸²⁸ The scheme provides \$6 000 over the two years towards course fees, and also provides employers with up to 20 days release time for the participating staff member.

The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union supported the scheme as an effective response to the need to upgrade qualifications in the long day care sector, and to the

⁸¹⁸ Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 2.

⁸¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁸²⁰ Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 2.

⁸²¹ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1.

⁸²² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) 2008, *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper*, DEECD, Melbourne, p. 18.

⁸²³ *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸²⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD, Paris, p. 216.

⁸²⁵ Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 23; Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 9; Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 32.

⁸²⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) 2008, *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper*, DEECD, Melbourne, p. 18.

⁸²⁷ Representatives of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 20.

⁸²⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) n.d., *Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships for Pathways Students: Frequently asked questions*, DEECD, Melbourne.

barriers that must be addressed for this to take place.⁸²⁹ However, the Union commented that the scheme is limited in scope, and suggested that it should offer twice as many scholarships, and increase the amount of study leave provided to one day per week.⁸³⁰ One Union representative also suggested that the program should be expanded to offer opportunities to those upgrading from certificate to diploma level.⁸³¹

Another key recommendation from the Union was that steps should be taken to clarify articulation through various early childhood qualifications, from certificate to diploma to degree.⁸³² The Union is currently working with leading tertiary providers to develop a best-practice model for articulation within the child care sector.⁸³³ The president of Early Childhood Australia (Victoria) agreed that it is important to develop a pathway with numerous entry points, so that early childhood professionals can pursue further opportunities from wherever they are currently positioned on the qualifications spectrum.⁸³⁴ The Committee notes that improving opportunities for articulation is likely to not only lift the expertise of early childhood professionals, but also open up career pathways to support retention in the workforce.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is another key issue in improving the level of qualifications in the early childhood workforce. The Committee heard that many early childhood professionals have extensive experience, which has given them the expertise equivalent to that required by a Certificate III, or even a diploma course. Representatives of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union indicated their support for existing RPL programs that enable such workers to gain qualifications in a reasonably short space of time.⁸³⁵ However, they noted that RPL is typically negotiated with training institutions on a case-by-case basis, and suggested that a more systematic approach be adopted, so that individuals do not have to negotiate terms for themselves.⁸³⁶

Other participants were more cautious about RPL opportunities. Early Childhood Australia (Victoria) is the organisation responsible for evaluating the quality of Victorian early childhood training programs. Its president commented that qualifications with a high component of RPL may have had 'a very minimal component of actual training', and should be 'looked at very carefully' if they are to be used as the basis for progression to a higher qualification. While recognising the value of on-the-job learning, the president suggested that even many years experience in a poor-quality service may not build skills equivalent to those that may be developed through formal training.⁸³⁷

The Committee agrees that it is highly desirable for early childhood services to be delivered by an appropriately skilled and qualified profession. It believes that measures to improve the level of qualifications in the early childhood workforce will not only improve the level of service quality, but will increase professionalism within the sector, and raise the sector's status in the broader community. At the same time, the Committee is aware that the sector is extremely diverse. The introduction of any such measures will therefore need to take

'Degree level qualifications in child development and how children learn help to optimise educational outcomes; however unqualified staff bring life experiences and practical wisdom as do parents, grandparents [and] extended family members.'

Community Child Care Association

⁸²⁹ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3.

⁸³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸³¹ Ms J. Walsh, Secretary, Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 18.

⁸³² Supplementary information provided by the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), September 2008.

⁸³³ *ibid.*

⁸³⁴ Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 24.

⁸³⁵ Representatives of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 18.

⁸³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸³⁷ Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 24.

account of the different needs of different types of early childhood professionals, as well as the challenges they may face in upgrading their professional expertise.

The Committee also believes that policies for professional learning for child care professionals should not focus on qualifications alone. Like other professionals, early childhood carers will benefit from participation in a range of professional learning activities, including many that do not lead to a formal credential. The Committee recognises the difficulties of introducing formal expectations for ongoing professional learning in a sector which does not currently have a regulatory body for members of the profession. However, it is the Committee's view that the Victorian child care workforce would benefit from the introduction of such expectations, to recognise and support their continuing development, irrespective of their level of qualification.

Recognition for developing professional expertise

The need for recognition for professional learning was an issue raised for both early childhood teachers and other professionals in the sector. One participant commented that there is currently no guarantee for early childhood teachers that upgrading to a master's degree or further qualification will result in professional advancement.⁸³⁸ She went on to observe that many kindergarten teachers choose to move into primary schooling to pursue the career opportunities available in the school sector.⁸³⁹ Other participants also identified a need for improved incentives and recognition for further training for child care workers and early childhood intervention professionals.⁸⁴⁰

The Committee nevertheless found that some mechanisms do exist for recognising early childhood professionals who upgrade their expertise. The certified agreement covering early childhood teachers provides opportunities for progression to two higher categories of teaching practice. Early childhood teachers with a minimum of three years' experience who have completed three PDEP rounds may apply for progression to the level of 'Accomplished Teacher'. After seven years' experience and the completion of a further four PDEP rounds, they may apply for recognition as an 'Exemplary Teacher'.⁸⁴¹ In each case, teachers must submit an 'Application for Validation', and have evidence of their practice assessed by an external validator and their employer.⁸⁴² Where both validator and employer agree that a higher teaching classification is warranted, the application is approved.⁸⁴³ Kindergarten Parents Victoria supported the validation process as a means of recognising the importance of ongoing professional learning for early childhood educators.⁸⁴⁴

The current award governing child care professionals in Victoria also sets out different wage rates for unqualified, Certificate III, diploma-qualified and advanced diploma or degree-qualified staff.⁸⁴⁵ This provides some level of recognition for the development of professional expertise. However, the Committee heard that many child care professionals do not consider the resultant increase in wages to be worth the investment of time and resources to complete a higher qualification.⁸⁴⁶ The Committee believes that improving support for professional learning for child care professionals may go some way towards

⁸³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁴⁰ Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 6; Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3; Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter) Inc, Written Submission, August 2008, p. 3.

⁸⁴¹ *Early Childhood Educators' Multi-Employer Certified Agreement 2005*, p. 11.

⁸⁴² *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸⁴³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁴ Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 5.

⁸⁴⁵ Australian Industrial Relations Commission, 'Hours of Work' in Part 6 of *Australian Industrial Loose-Leaf Consolidation Children Services (Victoria) Award 1998*, Award no AW772675CRV.

⁸⁴⁶ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3.

improving perceptions of the relative costs and benefits of upgrading their knowledge and skills.

Types of content for professional learning in the early childhood sector

Overall, the priorities for professional learning for early childhood educators identified in the inquiry were similar to those identified for teachers in schools. Like school teachers, early childhood professionals must have the skills to provide high-quality developmental programs, protect the welfare of children, respond appropriately to challenging behaviours, and attend to special learning or developmental needs. The Committee was interested to note that like schools, early childhood services also place a high priority on leadership development. This priority has recently been recognised by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, which has stated that the recently announced Victorian Institute of Educational Leadership will provide some leadership programs especially for the early childhood sector.⁸⁴⁷

As part of its role as Professional Support Coordinator for Victorian Children's Services, the Community Child Care Association undertakes ongoing analysis of the professional learning needs of staff in Victorian child care services. The analysis is based on the Association's participation in regular networks and forums, surveys, other regular contact with children's services and professional support providers, and reviews of relevant literature.⁸⁴⁸ The Association provided the Committee with a list of priority content areas for professional learning for long day care providers, the largest group of child care professionals in Victoria:

- changes in families' social environments, work arrangements and expectations of services;
- best practice in protective care for children at risk;
- responding to challenging behaviours in children;
- creating innovative play spaces;
- creating environments that support children from diverse backgrounds;
- health and safety, including healthy eating;
- management, leadership and human resource management skills for service leaders and deputies;
- inclusion of children with additional needs and knowledge of specific disabilities; and
- inclusion of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁸⁴⁹

The list broadly encompasses the various priorities that were identified by other early childhood stakeholders in the inquiry, although Gowrie Victoria added that skills in information and communication technologies (ICTs) are also essential.⁸⁵⁰

'...responding to that broad range of questions, from the very basic "How do I do this job when I walk in the door in the morning?" through to the much bigger questions of "Why am I doing this job? What does this mean about me and my role in the world and my impact on these children and then future generations of Australians?" is a big task.'

Ms Barbara Romeril,
Executive Director,
Community Child Care
Association

⁸⁴⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) 2008, *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, DEECD, Melbourne, p. 35.

⁸⁴⁸ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 3 (adapted).

⁸⁵⁰ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1.

'Early childhood educators are motivated by their own drive to learn and improve themselves, so that they can better engage with and develop and assist parents to develop the children in their care.'

Child Care Centres
Association of Victoria

Another priority identified for professional learning in the early childhood sector was the need to build skills in engaging and educating parents and families. The Committee heard that early childhood professionals, whether working in child care settings or kindergartens and preschools, regard parent support as a critical element of their role. Both Kindergarten Parents Victoria and the Child Care Centres Association of Victoria commented that early childhood services have a valuable role in educating parents about early childhood learning, and how they may support their child's development in partnership with the service provider.⁸⁵¹ Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter) also identified parent relationships as an important area for professional learning, as they are an essential element of early childhood programs for children with additional needs.⁸⁵²

Nevertheless, evidence to the inquiry presented mixed views regarding the content that early childhood professionals themselves typically prioritise in their professional learning. Gowrie Victoria told the Committee that demand for professional learning programs in the sector is often 'reactive', resulting from changes to early childhood regulations, and that compliance-oriented programs are therefore among the most popular.⁸⁵³ One child care centre leader agreed that it takes 'a lot of encouragement' to involve early childhood educators in professional learning in deeper-level content areas such as developing learning programs, theories of learning, or behaviour management.⁸⁵⁴ At the same time, the Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) reported a positive trend in the variety of professional learning programs available to early childhood professionals, from specific, compliance-based programs such as first aid courses, to 'current thinking, new ideas and innovations'.⁸⁵⁵ This suggests a growing awareness of and demand for deeper-level professional learning programs within the early childhood workforce.

Modes of delivery for professional learning in the early childhood sector

As was the case for teachers in schools, evidence to the inquiry did not reveal a single mode of delivery for professional learning that is most suitable to the early childhood workforce. Given the current emphasis on formal qualifications in the sector, one participant argued that it is most important for early childhood sector professional learning to provide articulation into or credits for accredited training courses.⁸⁵⁶ However, a representative of the Community Child Care Association told the Committee that her Association is most often asked to supply one-on-one, on-site assistance rather than specific courses of programs.⁸⁵⁷ This suggests that early childhood professionals are motivated to seek professional learning both to pursue higher qualifications, and simply to improve their capacity to deal with the issues that arise in their day-to-day work.

⁸⁵¹ Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3; Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁵² Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter) Inc, Written Submission, August 2008, p. 1.

⁸⁵³ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁵⁴ Ms K. Seadon, Assistant Director, Perry Street Child Care Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 20.

⁸⁵⁵ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, August 2007, p. 15.

⁸⁵⁶ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁵⁷ Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, pp. 4–5.

Externally-delivered courses and programs

Victorian early childhood professionals have a range of options for pursuing courses of further study to upgrade their qualifications. Skills Victoria lists 58 providers that offer the Diploma of Children's Services, and 114 that offer Certificate III in Children's Services.⁸⁵⁸ Early childhood education degrees are offered at seven universities across Victoria, with some offering additional opportunities for master's or doctoral programs.⁸⁵⁹ The Committee nevertheless heard that there may be a need for further development of postgraduate courses in specialist areas of early childhood intervention for children with additional needs.⁸⁶⁰

The organisations that participated in the inquiry also deliver a wide range of further professional learning opportunities. Gowrie Victoria offers 190 professional learning courses delivered by a team of around 40 qualified and experienced presenters, which attract around 4 000 participants every year. These include short courses and workshops, as well as credentialed programs. Gowrie Victoria also offers professional learning opportunities through observation at its own child care facility.

The Community Child Care Association, contracted by the Australian Government as the Professional Support Coordinator for Victorian Children's Services, offers learning opportunities to professionals in government-approved child care services. These include short courses, evening sessions, online courses and self-guided learning packages.⁸⁶¹ Another major professional learning opportunity identified in evidence was the annual Early Childhood Education Conference convened by Kindergarten Parents Victoria, which attracts about 700 participants per year.⁸⁶²

The Committee heard mixed opinions regarding the suitability of the professional learning opportunities currently available to early childhood professionals in Victoria. One participant commented that there are excellent providers of professional learning for early childhood professionals available across the state.⁸⁶³ However, others were less optimistic about the current range of provision. One submission identified a need for more high-end courses, complaining that too many of the courses currently available are overly repetitive or simplistic.⁸⁶⁴ The Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) reported that early childhood educators find that professional learning programs are too often delivered by the same presenters.⁸⁶⁵ Another participant added that it is generally not profitable to offer professional learning for early childhood educators, meaning that few private providers are currently available.⁸⁶⁶ She went on to recommend that the government investigate ways to identify current providers of professional learning in the early childhood sector, and assist or encourage new providers in the field.⁸⁶⁷

The Committee found that concerns about the availability of professional learning for early childhood professionals relate especially to access in non-metropolitan areas.⁸⁶⁸ The two major providers of early childhood professional learning who participated in the inquiry commented on their efforts in ensuring that opportunities are available throughout Victoria. The Community Child Care Association is obliged to 'get a good spread geographically' as a

⁸⁵⁸ Skills Victoria website, <<http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/>>, accessed 11 November 2008.

⁸⁵⁹ Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) website, <<http://www.vtac.edu.au/>>, accessed 11 November 2008.

⁸⁶⁰ Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter) Inc, Written Submission, August 2008, p. 3.

⁸⁶¹ Supplementary information provided by the Community Child Care Association Inc, September 2008.

⁸⁶² Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 6.

⁸⁶³ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1.

⁸⁶⁴ Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 7.

⁸⁶⁵ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, August 2007, p. 13.

⁸⁶⁶ Ms R. Kinson, Education Consultant, Written Submission, July 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁶⁸ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, August 2007, p. 13.

condition of its Australian Government funding. However, a representative of the Association told the Committee that some regions simply do not have the 'critical mass' to enable professional learning to be implemented locally.⁸⁶⁹ Gowrie Victoria also provides non-metropolitan courses within its extensive professional learning program, most of which are short-term, but some of which lead to a Certificate III or diploma. The chief executive officer of Gowrie Victoria told the Committee that regional provision is 'very costly' for the organisation, and still often involves significant travel for rural and regional participants.⁸⁷⁰

The Committee heard that flexible or online delivery of professional learning can be highly valued by early childhood professionals. As well as improving access in rural and regional areas, flexible delivery helps those juggling full-time work and family commitments with ongoing training. One participant told the Committee that she gained a bachelor's degree through the Pathways Program at the University of Melbourne, which enabled her to undertake most of her learning either in the workplace or online. The participant commented that this suited her as a full-time worker and parent, although also observed that some may struggle to find the discipline and motivation to undertake a course with such a high proportion of self-directed study.⁸⁷¹

Two major providers of professional learning for early childhood professionals in Victoria also endorsed the value of online modes of delivery. A representative of the Community Child Care Association told the Committee that its new online program is going 'surprisingly well'.⁸⁷² An important element of the program's success is that it enables participants to interact with the trainer in real time, rather than relying on 'a mechanised tick-the-box process'.⁸⁷³ In a written submission, the Association added that self-guided and online learning have proved to be successful modes of delivery for many unqualified or less experienced early childhood professionals.⁸⁷⁴ Gowrie Victoria is also looking at developing online programs in certain areas. However, its president commented that as early childhood is a relationships-based industry sector, it is necessary to be able to observe a staff member interacting with a child or parent in order to assess them.⁸⁷⁵

On-site and collegial professional learning

Like school teachers, early childhood professionals may also enhance their professional learning opportunities by learning from each other. Mentoring was one form of collegial professional learning to receive support in the inquiry, and the Committee notes that professional learning through peer support and mentoring already occurs informally in the early childhood sector.⁸⁷⁶ Another participant supported the value of team-based approaches to professional learning for early childhood professionals.⁸⁷⁷

However, the Committee heard that some early childhood professionals may find it difficult to undertake collegial professional learning activities in their workplaces. One of the key issues raised by Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) was the small size of many

⁸⁶⁹ Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 5.

⁸⁷⁰ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 31.

⁸⁷¹ Ms K. Seadon, Assistant Director, Perry Street Child Care Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 19.

⁸⁷² Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 3.

⁸⁷³ *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁴ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 5.

⁸⁷⁵ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 30.

⁸⁷⁶ Kindergarten Parents Victoria, *Vision 2011: A Vision for early childhood education – preparing children for life*, KPV website, <<http://www.kpv.org.au/page/view/vision-2011-48/>>, accessed 3 November 2008.

⁸⁷⁷ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 30.

kindergartens compared to schools, which limits the opportunities that early childhood teachers have to learn from each other.⁸⁷⁸ While long day care centres typically have a minimum of 14 staff, the Committee heard that kindergartens may consist of only one teacher and an untrained assistant.⁸⁷⁹ This not only limits opportunities for collegial professional learning, but may also create difficulties in implementing staff appraisal and professional guidance processes, such as the PDEP.⁸⁸⁰

The Committee heard that improved networking opportunities may be especially important in increasing the opportunities that early childhood professionals have to learn from one another. Most Victorian kindergartens are part of cluster management or local government groups, which provide some opportunities for professional dialogue.⁸⁸¹ Several participants argued for improved support for professional networks, to encourage the spread of best practice, and enable professionals to work together to meet local challenges and needs.⁸⁸² Kindergarten Parents Victoria is currently involved in a pilot project to create networks in three local government areas, to provide early childhood teachers with improved access to 'on-the-job' professional learning.⁸⁸³

In general, the Committee endorses the value of collegial or centre-based professional learning activities. As noted earlier in the report, on-site professional learning activities provide valuable opportunities for professionals to share expertise, and discuss and reflect on their practice in authentic workplace environments. For degree-qualified early childhood teachers (as for school teachers), on-site or collegial professional learning activities may also offer a worthwhile and cost-effective means of meeting the required minimum hours of professional learning.

At the same time, the Committee is concerned that these opportunities may be less well-supported by the current workforce regulations for non-degree-qualified child care workers. The Committee believes that the current emphasis on raising the level of formal qualifications in the child care sector may reduce the appeal of collegial professional learning, which does not offer credits for a formal degree. The Committee encourages centres and early childhood professionals to nevertheless consider the value of in-house programs in supporting the development of staff, and to seek ways to build them into their day-to-day activities. The Committee also suggests that participation in in-house professional learning should be recognised in any recognition of prior learning component of an early childhood certificate or diploma course, where appropriate.

Making connections beyond the early childhood sector

The Community Child Care Association argued that on-site professional learning activities may also be enhanced by collaboration with external experts. It recommended that resourcing be provided for research collaborations between early childhood services and university academics. The Association pointed to the New Zealand Centres of Excellence Program as an example of international best practice in this kind of collaboration.⁸⁸⁴ Beginning in 2003, six Centres of Excellence were selected across the country on three-year cycles, to participate in action research projects (with support from external partners) to explore and disseminate best practice. The program was found to be a valuable

⁸⁷⁸ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, August 2007, p. 18.

⁸⁷⁹ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 32.

⁸⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸⁸² Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 6; Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 4.

⁸⁸³ Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 10.

⁸⁸⁴ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 5.

way for early childhood services to improve their capacity to respond to local needs, and forge stronger links with families and communities.⁸⁸⁵

In addition, the Committee heard that the creation of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has opened up possibilities for collaboration between early childhood and school teachers in professional learning.⁸⁸⁶ The Department has announced

‘Teachers from both [school and early childhood] sectors need to understand the skills and strengths of each, and work to recognise and exchange those skills. If the imperative is: “What is best for the children”, rather than maintaining “silos” of knowledge and experience, this then can be a strong motivator for enhanced programs for children.’

Gowrie Victoria

plans to increase opportunities for early childhood and primary school teachers to share professional learning and expertise, including proposals to increase co-location of primary schools and early childhood services.⁸⁸⁷ Some participants endorsed the provision of opportunities for school and early childhood teachers to share their knowledge in an environment of mutual respect.⁸⁸⁸ Another commented that closer links between early childhood and school education may be especially beneficial for children with additional learning needs, in enabling specialist support to continue into primary schooling.⁸⁸⁹

Some participants expressed concern that closer integration may put early childhood education at risk of being absorbed into a school-based model.⁸⁹⁰ However, the Committee also heard that the increasing use of play-based learning in the early years of schooling has improved opportunities for knowledge-sharing between the school and early childhood education sectors to occur on a reciprocal basis.⁸⁹¹ The Committee notes that this relationship is likely to be further strengthened by the new Victorian developmental framework for children aged 0–8 years, to support a smooth transition from early childhood education into schooling. Two participants endorsed the development of the framework, with one describing it as ‘the most important thing that has happened to the early childhood sector for some time’.⁸⁹²

Implementing professional learning in early childhood services

As for schools, the successful implementation of professional learning in the early childhood sector depends on the support that is provided at the centre level. This support must include the allocation of resources to enable professional learning to occur, and effective leadership to create workplace cultures that encourage staff to engage in continual learning and improvement to their practice. However, the Committee heard that both early childhood teachers and child care workers currently face a number of challenges in implementing effective strategies for professional learning in their workplaces.

⁸⁸⁵ B. Overall 2006, ‘Review of “Catching the waves: Innovation in early childhood education”’, *Kairaranga*, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 47.

⁸⁸⁶ Mr J. Graham, Research Officer, Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 12 September 2007, p. 20.

⁸⁸⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) 2008, *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper*, DEECD, Melbourne, p. 18.

⁸⁸⁸ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1; Kindergarten Parents Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 5.

⁸⁸⁹ Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter) Inc, Written Submission, August 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁹⁰ Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 11; Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 24.

⁸⁹¹ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1; Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 11.

⁸⁹² Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 29; Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 24.

Resources for professional learning

The two unions representing early childhood teachers and child care workers indicated that their members typically identify lack of time and resources as the most significant barriers to their professional learning.⁸⁹³ The Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) commented that the limited funding available for professional learning means that early childhood teachers must often cover the costs of professional learning themselves.⁸⁹⁴ The Union also reported that early childhood teachers often undertake professional learning during weekends and evenings, due to limited resources to meet the cost of teacher replacement.⁸⁹⁵ A representative of Kindergarten Parents Victoria agreed that many kindergarten administrators simply feel that they do not have sufficient resources to cover the costs of day-to-day professional support and development for their staff.⁸⁹⁶

The Committee heard that it is also common for child care professionals to be expected to undertake professional learning in their own time.⁸⁹⁷ Child care services face the same difficulties as early childhood education services in locating replacement teachers and covering the costs of their employment.⁸⁹⁸ Other participants reported that the costs of professional learning for child care workers are also most likely to fall on the individual.⁸⁹⁹ One remarked that covering the costs of their own professional learning is a substantial barrier for many child care workers, given the low wage rates in the sector.⁹⁰⁰

The Committee heard that some provision has been made to supply resources for professional learning in current regulations and industrial agreements for early childhood professionals. The current industrial agreement for Victorian early childhood teachers requires employers to allocate two 'child free days' per year, which may be used for professional learning determined by the employer.⁹⁰¹ The remaining two days of professional learning for early childhood teachers (out of the requisite four) may also be undertaken during working hours, provided this does not disrupt teachers' other contracted non-teaching duties.⁹⁰² Like school teachers, early childhood teachers have designated hours in a working week in which they are free from teaching duties, to prepare programs for children and undertake management support and ancillary tasks.⁹⁰³

However, the agreement also suggests that early childhood teachers may undertake some professional learning in their own time.⁹⁰⁴ Kindergartens and preschools close for school holidays as determined by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The agreement states that early childhood educators in classroom teaching roles are entitled to school holidays as set out by the Department, with those in leadership positions instead receiving four weeks annual leave.⁹⁰⁵ The Committee heard that some early

⁸⁹³ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, August 2007, p. 14.

⁸⁹⁴ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, August 2007, p. 17.

⁸⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁹⁶ Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 12.

⁸⁹⁷ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 6.

⁸⁹⁸ Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 7.

⁸⁹⁹ Ms J. Walsh, Secretary, Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 17; Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 30; Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 6.

⁹⁰⁰ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 6.

⁹⁰¹ *Early Childhood Educators' Multi-Employer Certified Agreement 2005*, p. 15.

⁹⁰² *ibid.*

⁹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 28.

childhood teachers access professional learning in their holiday time,⁹⁰⁶ although this is not 'the standard' across the sector.⁹⁰⁷

Financial resources for professional learning are also a shared responsibility between early childhood teachers and their employers, to be negotiated as part of the PDEP process.⁹⁰⁸ One education consultant expressed concern that there is currently no obligation on employers to provide funding for early childhood teachers' professional learning. However, she also remarked on a 'welcome increase' in employer support for professional learning over recent years, due to efforts on the part of early childhood organisations to raise the profile of professional learning in the sector.⁹⁰⁹

The Committee heard that it is often more difficult for child care professionals to access professional learning opportunities, compared to their colleagues in early childhood education. Child care professionals do not have the same contractual entitlements to child-free days or non-contact working hours, limiting the time that they have available for professional learning during the normal working day.⁹¹⁰ They also often do not have additional opportunities to undertake professional learning during school holiday periods, as long day care centres often operate for up to 50 weeks per year.⁹¹¹ Furthermore, the Committee notes that the longer operating hours of child care services, which must accommodate parents' working arrangements, may make it difficult to organise collegial professional learning activities adjacent to the working day.

The Committee heard that many child care professionals may also be less willing to undertake professional learning in their own time. The assistant director of one child care centre commented that it is 'unfair' to expect staff to give up their own time for professional learning when the wage they receive 'does not reflect that kind of commitment'. She commented that higher-trained child care staff will often be more likely to attend after-hours professional learning, but that it can be 'very hard' to get staff with lower wages and lesser responsibilities to attend training outside working hours.⁹¹² Gowrie Victoria commented that child care staff are often happy to attend professional learning after hours when it is offered at their centre, but that it would be preferable for centres to close for a day to enable whole-staff professional learning.⁹¹³

Some regulatory measures to support professional learning in child care services are provided through the current quality assurance processes at the national level. Almost all Victorian long day care services participate in the national Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), to be eligible for approval as a provider under the national Child Care Benefit Scheme.⁹¹⁴ The QIAS sets out a series of quality areas and principles that services must meet to be eligible for approval, one of which is 'management provides professional development opportunities for staff'.⁹¹⁵ The QIAS is complemented by parallel quality assurance systems for family day care services and outside school hours care,

⁹⁰⁶ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 31.

⁹⁰⁷ Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 13; Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 8.

⁹⁰⁸ *Early Childhood Educators' Multi-Employer Certified Agreement 2005*, pp. 14–15.

⁹⁰⁹ Ms R. Kinson, Education Consultant, Written Submission, July 2008, p. 1.

⁹¹⁰ Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 8.

⁹¹¹ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 31.

⁹¹² Ms K. Seadon, Assistant Director, Perry Street Child Care Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 20.

⁹¹³ Gowrie Victoria, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1.

⁹¹⁴ Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3.

⁹¹⁵ National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc, *QIAS – 7 Quality Areas and 33 Principles*, NCAC website, <http://www.ncac.gov.au/child_care_professionals/qias_quality_areas.asp#7>, accessed 10 November 2008.

which also provide for staff participation in professional learning activities.⁹¹⁶ The Child Care Centres Association of Victoria indicated its support for the QIAS, which it commented is 'looked on with envy by the rest of the world'.⁹¹⁷

The Committee heard that the current policy emphasis on building skills in the child care workforce may also generate further support for ongoing professional learning at the employer or system level. One participant commented that most centres are now prepared to cover the cost of a Certificate III training program for unqualified staff wishing to upgrade their skills.⁹¹⁸ The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union also recommended that the Australian Government provide low-cost or no-cost courses for teachers upgrading their skills through the Skilling Australia Initiative.⁹¹⁹

Creating a culture of professional learning

One participant told the Committee that the most effective strategy for overcoming barriers to professional learning for early childhood professionals will be the establishment of a culture of professional learning across the sector. This should include ensuring that all services have staff capable of providing pedagogical leadership, as well as developing day-to-day professional learning activities such as action learning, mentoring and professional reading groups.⁹²⁰ The Committee notes that a professional learning culture must also involve recognition of the importance of professional learning by both employers and employees, reflected in the allocation of their time and resources.

Evidence to the inquiry revealed varied opinions regarding the extent to which a culture of professional learning currently exists within the early childhood sector. The Committee heard that a cultural shift is occurring in the sector, with early childhood staff exhibiting growing awareness of their own professionalism, and of the need for ongoing professional learning to maintain high standards of professional practice.⁹²¹ However, the evidence suggested that this culture may be less developed in certain areas, especially in child care services. Two participants identified a 'cultural barrier' to professional learning in child care, in that some employers do not regard lower-qualified or lower-paid staff as worthy of investment in ongoing learning.⁹²² Some also commented on the high workforce turnover in the child care sector, compared to kindergarten or preschool services.⁹²³ The Committee notes that this may set up a 'vicious cycle' with regard to investment in professional learning, as staff do not feel motivated to make a long-term investment in their learning, and employers see little incentive to support them.

The Committee also heard that some child care professionals may themselves not be confident or comfortable with upgrading their professional expertise. Ms Gilda Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, told the Committee that this may be most problematic in the family day care sector, which is typically comprised of parents who care

⁹¹⁶ National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc, *Quality Assurance in Children's Services*, NCAC website, <http://www.ncac.gov.au/about_ncac/qa_childrens_services.asp>, accessed 10 November 2008.

⁹¹⁷ Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3.

⁹¹⁸ Ms K. Seadon, Assistant Director, Perry Street Child Care Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 17.

⁹¹⁹ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 4.

⁹²⁰ Community Child Care Association Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 7.

⁹²¹ Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 2; Child Care Centres Association of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, September 2008, p. 8.

⁹²² Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p.3; Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 27.

⁹²³ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 1; Ms M. Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 14; Ms B. Romeril, Executive Director, Community Child Care Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 5.

'Partly it is a cultural thing and we have to shift the culture to understand that if you want to be a professional, you need to do professional development on an ongoing basis.'

Ms Meredith Carter,
Chief Executive Officer,
Kindergarten Parents
Victoria

for a small number of additional children in their homes. Ms Howard commented that family day care operators often 'do not see a need to be qualified as child-care workers, because they are mothers and they have the skills they require'.⁹²⁴ Another participant commented that many unqualified early childhood educators in all types of services have had unsuccessful experiences with formal schooling themselves, and therefore have some apprehension about returning to formal study.⁹²⁵

The Committee heard a number of suggestions regarding how early childhood professionals with limited experience of formal study may be supported to undertake ongoing professional learning. One participant noted that courses which include recognition of prior learning are highly successful in encouraging unqualified early childhood professionals to take on 'little bits and pieces' of study to fill knowledge gaps.⁹²⁶ The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union also recommended that less confident students could be supported by mixed methods of course delivery, and better preparation and support programs to bridge gaps in academic literacy.⁹²⁷ Gowrie Victoria's chief executive officer told the Committee that the organisation has experienced

success with targeted programs that enable unqualified early childhood professionals to learn together with colleagues in similar circumstances.⁹²⁸ The Committee notes that informal in-house professional learning may also be highly effective in encouraging early childhood professionals to assess and develop their practice in an environment of collegial support.

The president of Early Childhood Australia (Victoria) also suggested that government requirements should be introduced to provide all early childhood staff with a guaranteed quantity of professional learning. In the organisation's view, this would ensure that 'battles' over resourcing for professional learning will not have to be 'fought on the floor' every time a professional learning opportunity arises.⁹²⁹ The Committee agrees that strengthening expectations for all early childhood professionals to engage in professional learning will help to ensure that the importance of professional learning is recognised at the employer level. It may also encourage the professionals themselves to regard professional learning as an essential part of their work, and support the growth of a culture of professional learning across all levels of the early childhood workforce.

Summary and recommendations

The early childhood sector in Victoria is currently undergoing significant review and reform. The Committee is pleased to note that these reforms have engaged with the issue of increasing the professionalism and expertise of all early childhood professionals, irrespective of the services in which they work. The Committee believes that this can only improve the level of service provided to Victorian children in the crucial early years of development, as well as creating and supporting a culture of ongoing professional learning in the sector.

⁹²⁴ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 31.

⁹²⁵ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3.

⁹²⁶ Ms K. Seadon, Assistant Director, Perry Street Child Care Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 19.

⁹²⁷ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, September 2008, p. 3.

⁹²⁸ Ms G. Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 31.

⁹²⁹ Ms M. Fox, President, Early Childhood Australia (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 18 September 2008, p. 24.

The Committee acknowledges that higher qualifications form an important part of this strategy. It therefore supports the availability of scholarships and other opportunities for early childhood professionals to upgrade their credentials, and endorses the development of seamless pathways to facilitate articulation through higher levels of expertise. The Committee believes it is important to recognise the existing expertise of the early childhood workforce in developing these pathways, by including opportunities for the recognition of prior learning within credentialed early childhood professional learning programs.

At the same time, the Committee believes that the growing professionalism of the early childhood workforce should not solely be represented in the pursuit of higher qualifications. The Committee encourages early childhood educators and employers to explore a range of professional learning opportunities, including both credentialed and non-credentialed programs. As for teachers in schools, on-site activities that draw on the expertise of colleagues may be especially valuable as ways to share professional knowledge and facilitate reflection on practice.

Overall, the Committee believes that the early childhood sector is only just beginning to realise its potential as a highly professionalised and expert workforce. The Committee believes that a major step forward in building this professionalism may be a system of registration for early childhood professionals, which takes into account the different types of services and different categories of worker present in the sector. This could then lay the foundations for a sector-wide regulatory framework, encompassing professional standards and expectations for ongoing professional learning.

RECOMMENDATION

5.1. That the Victorian Government support professional learning for all professionals involved in the delivery of early childhood education and care, by:

- supporting expectations for early childhood professionals to engage in ongoing professional learning, and for their employers to provide opportunities for them to do so;
- facilitating clearer pathways for articulation between certificate, diploma and degree qualifications, including opportunities for the recognition of prior learning where appropriate;
- continuing to make scholarships and other forms of support available for existing early childhood professionals seeking to upgrade their expertise; and
- encouraging early childhood professionals to pursue opportunities for collegial professional learning, through site-based programs, networks or collaboration with schools and other service providers.

Adopted by the Education and Training Committee
Legislative Council Committee Room, Parliament House
East Melbourne

8 December 2008

