

Effective employment-based training models for childcare workers

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Childcare workers play a significant role in the learning and development of children in their care. This has major implications for the training of workers. Under new reforms of the childcare industry, the Australian government now requires all workers to obtain qualifications from a vocational education and training provider (e.g. Technical and Further Education) or university. Effective models of employment-based training are critical to provide training to highly competent workers. This paper presents findings from a study that examined current and emerging models of employment-based training in the childcare sector, particularly at the Diploma level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 16 participants who represented childcare directors, employers and workers located in childcare services in urban, regional and remote locations in the State of Queensland. The study proposes a 'best-fit' employment-based training approach that is characterised by a compendium of five models instead of a 'one size fits all'. Issues with successful implementation of employment-based training models are also discussed.

Introduction

Demands for early childhood care and education continues to grow rapidly in Australia. Whereas the need for care of children until pre-school by childcare workers remains a key requirement, there is now a higher expectation for their early learning and education as part of that care (Elliot 2004). Better skilled workers are needed to meet this trend in demands for learning and education services. A recent review of literature by Choy, Bowman, Billett, Wignall and Haukka (2008) suggests that new effective employment-based training (EBT) models are now essential not only at the Certificate III level but also at the Advanced Diploma level to meet projected high future growth in employment at the paraprofessional level (Department of Employment and Training 2005, Department of Education and Training 2006, Australian Industry Group 2005). Emerging EBT models need to meet not only the macro-economic needs of Australia but also the operational needs of industry and the personal needs of workers. Therefore, quality EBT is about meeting the needs of three main players to ensure quality skills outcomes that contribute effectively in maintaining and developing further the national economy. Effective models of EBT need to meet the needs of learners to participate in education and training while earning. They must allow employers to support learning and remain competitive within the marketplace. The models also need to enable the vocational education and training providers (or registered training organisations—RTOs) to facilitate (flexibly) the EBT arrangements.

This paper is based on a national research study conducted by Choy *et al.* (2008) that explored existing models of employment-based training to propose a compendium of five effective models. It begins by briefly describing the context of childcare services in Australia and then explains the concept of EBT. An overview of the research method to collect data for the study is provided before presenting the 'best-fit' EBT models. The models are held to: (i) be pedagogically sound, (ii)

lead to quality skill formation, (iii) have positive outcomes for both individuals and the straight enterprises, (iv) be functionally operative, and (iv) be effectively enacted and sustained over time. Hence, they have applications in other industries as well as outside Queensland and Australia. Issues impacting on successful implementation of these models are also discussed.

Childcare in Australia

Childcare services in Australia are available through long day care centres, kindergartens, family day care schemes, occasional care, school age care and in-home care. These services and qualification requirements are regulated and set by legislations in each jurisdiction (State/Territory). Hence there are disparities across Australia.

Workers in the childcare services are grouped into three levels of employment: senior (director/coordinator), middle (assistant director/group leader/teacher), and assistant. A director requires an Advanced Diploma or degree, a group leader a Diploma and an assistant a Certificate III qualification. Workers gain qualifications from universities (degree or postgraduate) or vocational education and training (VET) providers comprising Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and private training providers. The VET qualifications sit within the Community Services Training Package and range from Certificate II to IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services).

There is demand for higher levels of skills above the Certificate III level for workers to professionally provide the learning and developmental needs of children and to meet the emerging needs for special services, especially from those with complex needs and from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Surprisingly, although there was a rise in enrolments for training at the Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008) noted a nation-wide shortage of

qualified childcare coordinators and workers who require these qualifications. This was largely due to poor completion rates and inadequacies in current models of EBT that limit the types of skills development required by childcare workers.

Although demands for early childhood education and care continue to increase, there is little consistency in regulations between jurisdictions and a high number of workers with minimum or no qualifications. In Queensland, for instance, enrolment in a course is mandatory, although there is no pressure to complete the qualification within any set period. In South Australia, childcare centres are required to have a minimum number of qualified staff on duty, based on the number of children in care. For example, there must be at least one qualified staff member for every 35 children aged two years and over. An approved qualification is a tertiary qualification in childcare or early childhood education (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services 2008). In Victoria, workers are required to have at least a Certificate III in Children's Services or training that is substantially equivalent to or superior to a Certificate III (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Education 2009). Some consistency in qualifications is expected following the Commonwealth Government endorsement for childcare workers with a VET or university qualification. However, this will take time as several key issues (e.g. training regulations, wages, quality of graduates and assessment processes) need to be addressed.

With greater numbers of parents in employment and increasing demand for longer hours of operations, the expansion of the childcare sector will undoubtedly continue. The search for better EBT models to prepare childcare workers is imperative. Effective EBT models for childcare workers need a sound theoretical basis and must be practical in terms of their operations. Furthermore, current issues

and barriers with EBT for childcare workers need to be addressed for more successful EBT.

Research by Misko (2003) and later by the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council (2006) show the main issues and barriers include: low wages, limited opportunities for career progression, low community recognition and status, lack of qualified and experienced workers to supervise trainees, and low levels of formal support for new recruits and graduates. Compared to workers in other sectors with similar levels of responsibilities for care and education of children, childcare workers appear to be short-changed. Other research (e.g. by the Office of Early Childhood Education 2008, COAG 2008, Australian Labour Party 2007) show that 40% of childcare workers in Australia do not have formal qualifications, one in five childcare workers leaves the occupation every year, and two out of three people who enrol in a childcare course do not complete it. These findings are alarming. The childcare workforce will continue to experience shortage and under-rated quality in services unless these issues are addressed.

Existing employment-based training models

Employment-based training models in Australia engage learners through contemporary and situated practice in the workplace, and last long enough to provide a repertoire of experiences. While in the workplace, learners have opportunities to engage with experts and complete formal course components. They are assessed and certified while practising their vocation.

Three models of EBT are commonly used by the VET sector: fast track options, higher level VET qualifications through college-based and apprenticeship models, and access programs for young people, immigrants and refugees.

Fast track options

Fast-tracking options, used mainly to address immediate skills shortage, offer accelerated progression by shortening the duration of training. It reflects a truly competency-based approach—intensive up-front training followed by work-based learning to ensure trainees contribute productively when in the workplace. Even though workers/apprentices in the sector have the opportunity to fast track the completion of their qualification, this model is not so popular because employers value experiences gained from a number of settings.

Higher level VET qualifications

Higher level VET qualifications, gained through an apprenticeship or by undertaking a vocational course, aim to provide learners with middle-level workforce skills. This model offers blended learning approaches to those enrolled at the Diploma level or above. Childcare workers develop higher level skills through a combination of on-the-job training and off-the-job training that is facilitated in face-to-face and online modes. Apprentices who are in full-time employment are normally permitted varying periods of study time, yet many are expected to complete the formal learning tasks in their own time. While this type of arrangement works for apprentices who are more self-directed and motivated, others prefer time during working hours to complete learning tasks. The model is pedagogically sound in terms of providing experiences of the vocational practice, duration and link to formal education. However, it is limited by a lack of expert support in the workplace, and poor assessment and certification.

Access programs

In Australia, access programs are preparatory, prevocational or bridging courses designed to provide people with extra skills or confidence in order to enter vocational education and training (DET 2009). Many providers offer these programs to help people to improve their study, reading or workforce skills. Under these

programs, school students aged over 17 years can commence a Certificate III qualification through a School-based Traineeship that allows them to work as an assistant one day a week. For young people who are not at school, employment-based apprenticeship provides an alternative to join the industry. However, employers prefer to recruit workers who have experience with children and display 'maturity' when dealing with children. The Certificate III in Children's Services offers learning and employment opportunities for many adult immigrants and refugees interested in joining the sector. However, individuals need to organise assessment of workplace learning to meet the requirements of the syllabus. Regardless of the qualifications, effective employment-based training models are essential for childcare workers.

Method

The research adopted the qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews with a sample of 16 participants who represented childcare directors, employers and workers. This was a convenience sample, with the researchers relying on the accessibility and availability of the volunteer participants during the period of data collection. The sample was located in childcare services in urban, regional and remote locations in the State of Queensland. Some services were privately owned and operating state-wide, and others were community and/or church-based. Although the sample size is small and is not representative of all stakeholders, the issues and views expressed by the interviewees are consistent with findings reported in literature.

The interview questions explored experiences with vocational education and training (VET) for Certificate III and higher level qualifications. The study explored the capacity of various models to produce quality outcomes and be practical. The interviews included discussions around:

- formal education opportunities to engage with knowledge about the vocation;
- experiences of vocational practice in the workplace, or the enactment of the occupation for which they are preparing;
- opportunities to engage with experts who can guide the learner, monitor their progress and provide direct assistance for things they will not learn through discovery alone;
- duration of the training and whether it was long enough to learn and practise the repertoire of vocational knowledge and skills required; and
- assessment and certification practices.

Other issues that influence functional aspects of the models such as regulations, administrative and licensing arrangements, wage rates, and their links to work situations were also discussed. Data were collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews, and via emails using a set of interview questions. Most of the data was collected via telephone interviews because of difficulties with access due to the geographic spread of the sites. Besides, sites visits required an official Blue Card which the researchers could not obtain within the timelines of the project. The conversations were recorded as hand written notes which were typed and returned to participants via email for confirmation.

'Best-fit employment' based training models

The findings confirmed a need to revisit and revise models of EBT, yet retain and extend the effective features of existing models. For instance:

- The childcare industry must have direct input into the mix of theory and practice in high quality vocational courses for apprenticeships. The theoretical component needs to be integrated on-the-job where apprentices can work with qualified staff at the same time learn and discuss observations/activities with them.

- Learning resources that are less academic in nature tend to assist new apprentices with their learning.
- Sets of skills/competencies grouped for assessment and recognition makes the process a lot more practical.
- Improved processes for recognition of prior learning and experiences with children would reduce the duration of apprenticeships.
- A clear pathway through the Australian Qualifications Framework (commonly known as the AQF) that articulates the roles and responsibilities of qualified staff is also needed. The AQF is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training (TAFEs and private providers) and the higher education sector (mainly universities) (DEEWR, 2009). Workers at the Director level, enrolled in a Diploma, need to have staff to supervise them to ensure that they do not contravene the conditions of training.
- Lastly, it is essential that all workplace assessors have up-to-date knowledge of the sector so that they can provide the necessary support to apprentices.

Elements of effective EBT models

Overall, EBT models need to be pedagogically sound, lead to quality skill formation, have positive outcomes for both individuals and enterprises, be functionally operative, and be effectively enacted and sustained over time. The strength of EBT in pedagogical terms lies in its provision of experiential learning in workplaces, which complements experiences in educational institutions. Five main elements of EBT make this an effective approach to developing vocational competence.

- First, the workplace offers *experiences of the vocational practice*. It provides a context for learners to access and develop the kinds of knowledge (i.e. conceptual, procedural and dispositional) that is available in settings where occupational practice occurs (Brown

1998, Billett & Boud 2001), and which are essential for the exercise of that vocational practice. It is in these settings where learners make meanings by contextualising the content within such environments.

- Second, the *duration* of EBT provides the possibility of developing, building, refining and honing skills over time.
- Third, learners get opportunities to *engage with experts* who possess the knowledge to be learnt, who can guide the learner, monitor their progress and provide direct assistance for things they will not learn through discovery alone.
- Fourth, the *links to formal education* through integration of on- and off-the-job training is a key feature to ensure theoretical aspects are understood and the provision of a broader learning experience than what the enterprise itself might offer.
- Finally, learning during EBT is *assessed and certified* to permit the learners to practise their vocation in circumstances other than where it was acquired. The competency-based training approach allows assessment of competence when individuals are deemed ready. This means learners could complete their training outcomes quickly and join the workforce as qualified, productive workers.

Five proposed models

Considering the diverse nature of childcare sites, and variations in the learning needs of childcare workers, a compendium of five models, instead of a 'one size fits all', is suggested for effective training. (For more details, see Choy *et al.* 2008).

1. *Traditional entry-level training model* features sets of learning experiences in both the workplace and educational settings across the duration of the entry-level period of training (i.e. between one and four years). Theoretically, this model is needed in the childcare sector, particularly for the skill and career development of lower-level childcare workers. It requires an effective integration of experiences and support in both educational and workplace settings.

2. *Accelerated entry-level training model* assists selected learners to progress speedily through the process of skill development with more effective and intense experiences in both the workplace and education institution. This model requires participants to be carefully selected on the basis of predicted performance. Their learning experiences in both the workplace and educational settings need to be carefully organised and maximised, and learners' progress must be closely monitored.
3. *Internship entry-level preparation model* provides for a period of employment related learning beyond the completion of an expedited entry-level training process that would initially lead the worker-learner to be afforded the status of 'internee'. This model also requires participants to be carefully selected on the basis of predicted performance, their experiences in both the workplace and educational settings carefully organised and maximized, and a clear process of monitoring learners' progress. This is to be followed by a managed and supported provision of probationary work within the workplace.
4. *Extension model of entry-level preparation* is intended for mature workers or those who are entering the particular occupation after or on the basis of success in another occupation. Learners must have maturity, a level of educational achievement and be located in employment that will permit a conscious focus on blending through work activity, over a period of time, and supported by educational provision which is provided outside of work time.
5. *Extension model for further development* is intended for mature workers or those who already have completed their initial occupational development and have some experience. It is recommended for learners who are able to engage in a program of study which meets their personal and professional needs, yet is aligned also to the interests and activities of

the current employment. It is likely that these learners will be sufficiently mature and possess a level of educational achievement that will permit them to study in a relatively independent way.

For those workers pursuing higher level qualifications at the Diploma level or above, the study found the *extension model for further development* (option 5) to be the 'best-fit' model for the childcare sector. It is a fully worked-based apprenticeship providing workers with rich employment-based experiences whilst meeting regulatory requirements, supported by educational provisions that mainly occur outside of work time; and does not require attendance at the educational institution during the working day. To assist the workers/apprentices develop their occupational capacities, employment-based experiences augment an extension kind of further educational provision, such as in the evening, at weekends or by distance. The educational provider, workplace and worker/apprentice share the responsibility of securing a rich integration of experiences. The model also requires and expects learners to be self-directed in their learning.

The proposed models of EBT seek to address the overall goal of providing good preparation for worthwhile jobs and, in doing so, address the kinds of characteristics required of effective EBT models. That is, these models are held to:

- be pedagogically sound
- lead to quality skill formation
- have positive outcomes for both individuals and enterprises
- be functionally operative
- be effectively enacted and sustained over time.

The alignment between these characteristics and the proposed models is briefly mapped in Table 1.

Successful implementation of the five models of EBT in the childcare sector would require adjustments to suit the needs of workers and

their workplaces. It would require attention to a number of complex issues such as training regulations, wages, quality of graduates and assessment processes which limit the effectiveness of EBT models to be addressed.

Issues limiting the effectiveness of EBT models

Issues such as disparities between licensing and training regulations, wages, quality of graduates and assessment processes impact on current models of EBT.

Training regulations

Requirements in Queensland's *Child Care Regulation 2003* around the number of staff required on the floor at any given time places constraints on quality time for supervision or for completing learning activities during operating hours. There is no incentive on the employer's part to encourage trainees to become qualified because 'enrolment' is accepted as 'qualified' for all levels of occupation under the Queensland legislation. This legislation allows employers to:

... engage workers without the necessary qualification if the engaged person has the required qualification of the level below, as long as they start a relevant course for the position they are engaged in within six months and complete the course within the prescribed finishing period (Queensland Community Services and Health Industry Training Council 2005: 10).

One employer said that providing the mandatory four hours per week study time to three workers meant that they were not available for 12 hours in the rooms. A couple of employers admitted that at times they had breached the training regulations because they could not remove workers from the floor without breaching the childcare regulations.

The mandatory four hours per week study time for the Cert III trainees is an issue. With three trainees that is 12 hours not available to the rooms and some rostering to make sure that we are consistently meeting the regulations (Employer, community based remote).

Table 1 Alignment between conceptual premises and proposed models

	1. Traditional' entry level training model	2. 'Accelerated' entry level training model	3. Internship entry level preparation model	4. Extension model of entry level preparation	5. Extension model for further development
Characteristic					
Pedagogically sound	Sequenced integration of experiences in work and educational settings.	Sequenced integration of experiences in work and educational settings, but carefully calibrated to assist effective skill development in shorter time span.	Sequenced integration of experiences in work and educational settings, in both earlier accelerated program and through opportunities to hone and extend skills in internees' final year.	Provision of experiences in work and educational settings. Learners play a key role in the direction and integration of experiences, particularly those in the educational setting.	Provision of experiences in work and educational settings. Learners play a key role in the direction and integration of experiences, particularly those in the educational setting.
Quality skill formation	Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational settings.	Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational settings, and careful management of experiences and monitoring of accelerated learning.	Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational settings, and careful management of experiences and monitoring of accelerated learning, and internship year.	Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational setting.	Specialising through further skill formation over time and with support in both workplace and educational setting.

Characteristic	1. Traditional' entry level training model	2. 'Accelerated' entry level training model	3. Internship entry level preparation model	4. Extension model of entry level preparation	5. Extension model for further development
Quality outcomes for individuals and enterprises	Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.	Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.	Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.	Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.	Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes, with a particular emphasis on personal and professional development.
Functionally operative	Traditional model well accepted in many industries.	A model that some enterprises have requested to be introduced.	A model requiring the commitment of enterprises to secure outcomes, and support the level of competence they are requesting.	Traditional model well accepted in many industries, which relies on the maturity of the learners.	Traditional model well accepted in many industries.
Effectively enacted and sustained	Demonstrated capacity for it to be enacted and sustained.	A model requiring the commitment of enterprises to secure outcomes, and support the level of competence they are requesting.	A model requiring the commitment of enterprises to secure outcomes, and support the level of competence they are requesting.	Demonstrated capacity for it to be enacted and sustained	Traditional model well accepted in many industries.

Following a recent review of the qualifications provision in the legislation to develop a new regulatory framework and recognise the link between the qualification levels of staff working in childcare and the quality of the care provided, the Queensland Department of Communities (2007) recommended a reduction in the time that assistants and directors must enrol in a course from six months to three months. The prescribed finishing times are yet to be established. These changes may satisfy some employers who were deterred from employing apprentices because of the lengthy timeframe for completion. The Department of Communities did acknowledge the concerns that employers have in relation to the 'quality and delivery of training modules, competencies and programs, and to consistency of practice and level of involvement and interaction between Registered Training Organisations and their students' (p. 49). As these concerns were outside the scope of their review, the Department referred them to the relevant Government department in the State. As a result, it did not review the disparities between the licensing and training regulations.

Wages

Wages in the childcare sector are too low for the kind of work done, particularly when compared with wages in other sectors/industries. The average weekly wage for childcare workers in the current *Children Services Award—State 2006* is \$807.60—13% lower than the average weekly wage of \$912.50 for employees in general (Wageline 2009, ABS 2009). One worker/apprentice stated that the experience needed to be a group leader is equivalent to that of a worker on the Metal Industry award, yet what she receives is a percentage of the trade rate. Because of the lack of clarity about roles, some workers/apprentices were taking on responsibilities above their levels and not being paid for doing so. Poor wages means that employers find it difficult to attract and retain good workers. This situation is well known, as reported by Watson (2006) who noted

that ‘employees in the childcare sector experience lower pay, less recognition, fewer opportunities for professional development, and poorer working condition than their counterparts in schools and pre-schools...’ (p. 14).

Quality of graduates

Some employers were dissatisfied with the quality of graduates and preferred not to employ school-leavers who proceeded as fast as possible through the qualification structure. They criticised the current training arrangements for apprentices for not providing an indication of a person’s **ability to work with children**:

To gain the skills we need, we do our own training to meet the standards. ... generally speaking, no one is meeting the standard. There is a huge variation in the quality. At all levels, registered training organisations train in the cheap and easy skills sets, such as OHS, but there is little application of knowledge and so although they may know not to have electrical cords hanging over benches, no one will attend to this or see it as being needed to do. They can tell you this as knowledge but that is where it stays; the emphasis on theory and only compliance knowledge, not action to remedy (Employer, large state-wide operator).

Employers found it difficult to recruit experienced workers, so a majority of workers are aged under 25 years with limited experience in the sector. One employer commented on the usefulness of School-based Traineeships as a means of recruiting assistants, explaining that saying one day per week onsite did not provide consistency for children, nor enough time to practise any activity. On the other hand, two employers supported School-based Traineeships, stating that the experiences provide students with an opportunity to decide whether childcare work is for them.

Assessment processes

In one way or another, all directors and employers were critical of assessment processes. They criticised the limited integration of theory

into practice, relevance of workbooks, lack of a tool kit/resource box of activities, and the use of essays and alien language, which particularly affected workers/apprentices with literacy problems and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many directors and employers preferred assessment methods where apprentices can demonstrate a range of integrated competencies through an activity. They called for an improved recognition process for experienced unqualified workers, shifting away from learners having to demonstrate competency in a single instance to a single assessor to groupings of skills sets for recognition. Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of teachers and workplace assessors modelling or demonstrating the necessary interpersonal skills to work with children and colleagues.

Many employers were concerned that assessors from VET institutions have no or little experience in the sector. One employer stated that some TAFE trainers and assessors were unable to keep up to speed with multiple dynamics such as simultaneous reviews of the training package, food standards, childcare benefits and service standards, and qualifications. Some employers avoided graduates from RTOs well known in their circles for lacking in quality. They compared RTOs that oblige with the required two site visits for on-the-job training during the period of an apprenticeship with those RTOs that offer responsive telephone contact and visits every three weeks. As a result, some childcare services are now RTOs, offering apprenticeships to their existing staff and providing training that they consider is high quality. One director held a professional development evening each week to link theory to practice for all workers undertaking study, whether it was within an apprenticeship model or through vocational courses.

National and State policy initiatives

National and State policy initiatives are attempting to address some of these issues. For instance, the Council of Australian Governments

(COAG) has committed \$1 billion for substantial reforms to early childhood education and care (Australian Government 2008). The Government has already allocated \$60.3 million to remove TAFE fees for around 8,000 students enrolling in a Diploma or Advanced Diploma of Children's Services.

The Queensland Government's *Children's Services Skilling Plan 2006–2009* provided existing eligible workers with access to subsidised training to gain the qualifications required by the *Child Care Act 2002* (Department of Employment and Training—DET and Department of Communities—DOC 2006). The Health and Community Services Workforce Council, on behalf of the Queensland Government, has developed a *Child Care Skills Formation Strategy* to address causes of skills shortages (i.e. the profile of the sector, systemic barriers, recruitment, retention and working conditions, and quality practice) and to undertake future workforce planning. To date, the Queensland Government has established a career pathway from VET to bachelors or graduate certificates, and developed a professional development course to engage participants in a comprehensive study of theoretical and practical issues involved in establishing, administering and improving programs that cater for children and families (Workforce Council 2007).

Summary

The compendium of five EBT models proposed in this paper is based on a recent exploratory study (Choy *et al.* 2008). The models are: 'Traditional' entry level training model; 'Accelerated' entry level training model; Internship entry level preparation model; Extension model of entry level preparation; and Extension model for further development. These models are argued to be pedagogically sound, potentially lead to quality skill formation, offer positive outcomes for both individuals and their enterprises, to be functionally operative, and can be effectively enacted and sustained over time.

However, successful implementation of these models requires strong partnerships between workers/apprentices, employers, RTOs, government bodies and other supporting agents. Furthermore, successful implementation of effective EBT models in the childcare sector needs all parties to address ongoing issues of recruitment and retention of staff, unattractive career paths, wages and conditions, course delivery, quality of graduates, and disparities between the licensing and training regulations.

Increasing demand for places and longer hours of operations, shortage of childcare workers, and greater emphasis on quality of care and early education are intensifying pressure on the sector. Although the 'hands-on' nature of the work remains unchanged, workers are expected to be qualified, increasingly at the paraprofessional level. Governments in Australia have pledged a commitment to address these complex and persistent issues in the childcare sector.

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