

# Family Day Care Australia

*Attracting the next generation of  
family day care educators*

Prepared by Survey Matters  
February 2019



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of the family day care educators who so generously gave of their time to complete the survey and provide us with an understanding of their experiences, thoughts and perceptions about being a family day care educator. Without your contribution this report and the data it contains would not be possible.

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For more information about this report, please contact:

**Rebecca Sullivan**  
Founder & Research Director  
**Survey Matters**

Phone: 61 3 9452 0101  
Email: [rsullivan@surveymatters.com.au](mailto:rsullivan@surveymatters.com.au)  
[www.surveymatters.com.au](http://www.surveymatters.com.au)




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# 01

## Executive Summary



Family day care is an approved form of child care that provides care for children in an educator's own home. It offers an alternative for families looking for a more flexible, individualised approach to care for their children in a small group environment.

To inform efforts to promote the sector and attract the next generation of educators, Family Day Care Australia (FDCA) has commissioned this study to provide a deeper understanding of the educator workforce in Australia - who they are, their motivations for becoming an educator, the challenges and barriers they face, the factors that make working in family day care both attractive and rewarding and the likely profile of future family day care educators.

This report summarises that research. It draws on the feedback and opinions of 1,288 current family day care educators working across Australia. In order to provide insight into the evolving profile of family day care educators, we have analysed the feedback through the lens of educators' experience in the sector to highlight any changes in attitudes and preferences over time. For this analysis we have classified educators as early career (0-3 years experience), mid career (4-10 years experience) and experienced (over 10 years experience).

Further, while the research was conducted using a quantitative online survey, educators were also given the opportunity to answer many questions in their own words. We have drawn heavily on this verbatim feedback in reaching our conclusions, as it adds richness to the story. To allow their voices to be heard, we have used the educators' own words throughout the report where their inclusion adds validation and depth.

The research also draws on the input of several family day care unit co-ordination service managers, as well as two focus groups with educators working in alternative early childhood education and care settings and students currently studying early childhood education and care. While discussions with students and educators in centre based environments indicated that a more detailed comparison of the personality profile, competencies and motivations of educators working in alternative settings may have provided additional depth to the study, their feedback provides another perspective of the attraction of, and potential barriers to, becoming a family day care educator.

### **The family day care sector**

In December 2018, there were 14,508 family day care educators working across 536 services in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Over half of all educators are aged between 30 and 50 years. While a third are older than 50, few educators are under 30. Eighty six percent (86%) have children of their own, although this figure is 93% of long term educators and only 77% amongst early career educators.

Reflecting the requirements of the National Quality Framework introduced in January 2012, nearly all family day care educators hold at least Certificate III qualifications in early childhood education and care, and over a half hold higher qualifications. The average length of time respondents have been a family day care educator is 8.7 years. While 43% of all educators have worked in alternative early childhood education and care settings before joining the family day care sector, this increases to 59% of educators who have been working in family day care for less than three years.

### **Family day care educators - values, attributes and perceptions**

The research found that personality plays a key role in suitability for the job. Family day care educators share many common characteristics, which have changed little over time. They are comfortable working independently and have a high degree of confidence in their own skills and ability to design educational programs and provide quality care for the children they look after. They value flexibility and like to work autonomously, with few expressing a need for more support over and above what is currently available to them.

This is in contrast to feedback from students and educators in alternative early childhood education and care settings, a majority of whom indicated that isolation, lack of confidence and concerns about risk and liability would prevent them from becoming a family day care educator. For these reasons, individuals who are confident in their abilities and comfortable working alone are most likely to be attracted to family day care.

Intrinsic job satisfaction is very important to educators and over two thirds (69%) would leave a job if it did not provide them with a sense of satisfaction. Positively, educators' feedback overwhelmingly indicates that educators obtain much enjoyment and satisfaction working with and developing relationships with the children in their care. A majority of educators (85%) intend to remain in the profession for the foreseeable future.

### **Motivations for becoming a family day care educator**

Educators join the family day care sector for a variety of reasons. And while many of these have remained consistent over time, it is clear there are also significant changes occurring.

The ability to work from home while caring for their own children remains a key motivation for starting a career in family day care. Overall, 47% of educators indicated that this was the main reason they became a family day care educator. However, it is significantly lower amongst early career educators (37%) than more experienced family day care professionals (64%), with only 32% of early career educators reporting they had pre-school aged children when they first became a family day care educator.

The strong bonds family day care educators have with the children in their care was another major theme amongst educators. Enjoyment working with children was an overwhelming theme of the verbatim feedback. Educators spoke warmly about the children in their care and their passion for children was clearly evident. The quality of relationships educators are able to develop with children and their families is obviously a source of much joy and satisfaction for most educators.

Flexibility is also very important to family day care educators and is one of the most frequently cited benefits of the job. Educators appreciate the flexibility to determine their own working days and hours, being able to work at home with their own children as well as the flexibility to be able to adapt daily programs and activities to the needs of the children in their care.

In a positive sign for the sector, the professionalisation of the workforce is also increasingly attracting educators from other early childhood education and care settings. A growing proportion of family day care educators have experience in other settings - nearly half (45%) of survey respondents who became educators within the last three years have previously worked in a long day care centre. This has increased significantly over the last ten years, with only 16% of long term educators having experience in early childhood education and care prior to becoming a family day care educator.

Dissatisfaction working in centre-based early childhood education and care settings is one of the major drivers of this trend and the second most common motivation for becoming an educator. In a sign of the changing profile of family day care educators, early career educators (13%) are significantly more likely to provide this as their main reason for joining the family day care sector than their more experienced (4%) counterparts. These educators expressed concern about the quality of care they were able to provide in centre based environments, due to the large number of children in long day care centres, high child to staff ratios and rigid routines.

As a result, there is also a growing number of educators attracted to family day care because it offers them the opportunity to use their skills and knowledge to develop individual care programs for children. Again reflecting the changing motivations of educators, early career educators (12%) were significantly more likely than those who have been in the sector for over ten years (5%) to indicate that this was their main reason for becoming a family day care educator. Educators increasingly believe that learning programs that are tailored to each child and provide children some choice over their daily activities are the factors with the most positive impact on quality of care. Family day care offers this, providing a clear angle for the marketing and promotion of family day care as a rewarding career.


### **Challenges facing family day care educators**

With concern that changes to the legislative payments and compliance framework may be contributing to a decline in educator numbers, understanding the challenges faced by educators was also a significant focus of the research.

As expected, the increasing administrative and compliance burden is clearly impacting many family day care educators and was one of the biggest themes surrounding the challenges faced by educators. The ever increasing paperwork and keeping up to date with programming, business and workplace safety requirements is clearly daunting. One positive in this area is that newer educators feel less burdened by administration and compliance than long term educators.

However, there were also many other challenges mentioned by survey respondents. Cost and housing are significant barriers to a career in family day care. Financial considerations are one of the biggest challenges educators face in setting up a family day care business, and many students and educators in other parts of the sector cited cost as a significant barrier to entry. The set up costs and difficulties for those without secure housing were also recognised as barriers by all of the managers in co-ordination units we spoke to, as well as the students of early childhood education and care. It may be that the sector can look to devise financial support and assistance schemes to help overcome some of these barriers.

Difficulty taking time off and a lack of employment entitlements are also a challenge faced by educators. Twenty eight percent (28%) of respondents indicated this was the most challenging aspect of their role. This rises to 33% of early career educators. Educators mentioned the difficulties that arise due to lack of back up, with comments that "there is no back up for parents when we are sick or want time off" and that they find it "very difficult to manage when I have taken time off or I have been unwell". While the co-ordination units that we spoke to indicated that they work with educators to facilitate time off in various ways, it remains a top of mind issue for many educators. Family day care services should be encouraged to develop innovative ways to address this challenge.



Most importantly, however, and suggesting a need for greater promotion of family day care as a quality early childhood education and care alternative, many of the challenges faced by family day care educators stem from the lack of understanding of family day care. Difficulties attracting enough children into their care, competition from long day care centres, not enough income and a perceived preference amongst parents for centre based care are outcomes of a lack of awareness.

Educators also feel undervalued. Despite being held to the same educational and quality framework standards as other early childhood education and care professionals, many family day care educators still believe that the public perceives them as 'babysitters', with little understanding of the professional educational service they provide.

### **Attracting the next generation of educators**

So who are the next generation of family day care educators and what will attract them to the work in the sector?

While most sectors look to young, recent graduates to fill their future talent pool, this approach is unlikely to yield results for the family day care sector. Lack of experience, confidence working alone, financial stability and access to appropriate and secure housing provide significant obstacles that prevent young educators entering the sector. Consequently, a majority of early career educators are aged between 30 and 50. The unique service provided by family day care educators indicates this is unlikely to change in the future.

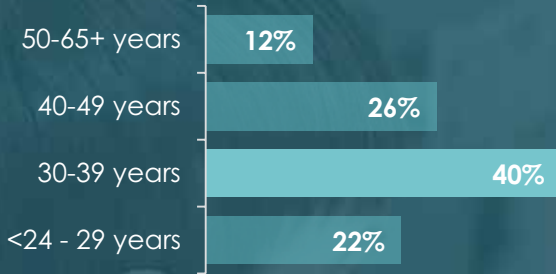
However, there are many aspects of the profile of a family day care educator that are evolving. Future family day care educators are more likely than in the past to be qualified, experienced early childhood education and care professionals. They are more likely to have worked in a long day care setting, kindergarten or pre-school. They want to use their skills and knowledge to design individual programs for children, as they believe this provides a higher quality of care. And while the ability to work at home with their own children will remain a motivation for becoming a family day care educator for many, this is likely to be a declining proportion in the future.

These are all positive signs for the future of family day care. However, while the flexible, personalised and high quality service makes family day care increasingly attractive to the next generation of educators, the research also demonstrates that there are many challenges for the sector. Most importantly, there is an urgent need to actively promote the sector. To continue to attract educators, it will be imperative to raise the profile of family day care educators so that their skills and experience are recognised and they are seen as equal with professionals working in alternative early childhood education and care settings.

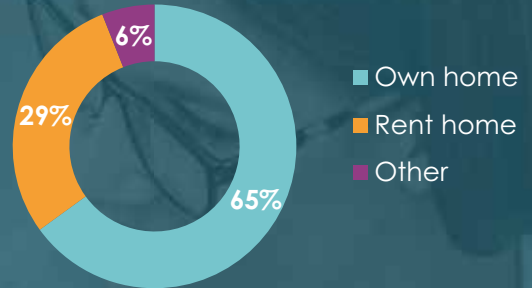


# Profile of a Future Educator

## IS AGED BETWEEN 30-50



## WHILE MOST OWN THEIR HOME, IS INCREASINGLY A RENTER



## DOES NOT NECESSARILY HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN AT HOME

77%

Have their own children

32%

Have pre-school children at home



## IS A QUALIFIED, EXPERIENCED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CAREER PROFESSIONAL

94%

Have Certificate III qualifications or higher

45%

Were previously employed in a long day care centre

85%

Intend to remain a family day care educator

## MOTIVATIONS

- 1 Work from home with kids
- 2 Develop individual care programs
- 3 Dissatisfaction with long day care environment

## BARRIERS

### Setting up a FDC Business

- Set up costs
- Finding enough children to care for
- Lack of financial and housing stability

### Working as an Educator

- Taking time off
- Administrative burden
- Lack of employment entitlements



# 02

## Introduction

# Introduction

## About Family Day Care

Family day care is an approved form of childcare that provides care for children in an educator's own home. It offers an alternative for families looking for a more flexible, individualised approach to care for their children in a small group environment.

Family day care educators are early childhood education and care professionals, registered with a family day care 'approved service'. The approved service administers a 'co-ordination unit' whose staff activity support and monitor educators in their work. All family day care educators must hold or be actively working towards at least an approved Certificate III level education and care qualification.

In Australia, national quality standards provide for a 1:7 educator to child ratio and educators may provide care for up to four pre-school aged children, including their own children, in their own home. Educators are required to base their educational program on an approved learning framework.

As at November 2018, there were 536 family day care services approved to operate under the NQF in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

## About the Research

Family Day Care Australia is the national peak body for family day care and represent a national membership of family day care educators and approved services. Its mission is to provide national leadership and foster excellence in early childhood education and care, through strong advocacy, research, collaborative networks and sector innovation.

In December 2018, Family Day Care Australia reported a national workforce of family day-care educators of 14,508.<sup>1</sup> This was down 21.8% in the twelve months from December 2017, with the largest decreases in educator numbers reported in Victoria (27.8%), South Australia (22.9%), Western Australia (19.2%) and New South Wales (18.9%).

In response, Family Day Care Australia has commissioned this research to provide a deeper understanding of the educator workforce in Australia – who they are, their motivations and the factors that make working in family day care both attractive and rewarding, as well as the challenges they face.

This report presents the findings of this research.



## Objectives

In order to inform efforts to attract and recruit the next generation of educators, the aim of the research was to describe the characteristics of family day care educators in Australia and how this has changed over recent times.

The research aims to create a profile of current family day care educators, including their professional qualifications and experience, their personal background and situation and their motivations and experiences of family day care. With concern that changes to the child care payments legislative framework and increased compliance enforcement activity, as well as increasing administration and regulatory burden, may be contributing to the decline in educator numbers, understanding the challenges faced by educators and, providing recommendations to overcome these barriers, is also part of the focus of this research.

Specifically, the research sought to:

- Explore the current socio-demographic profile of family day care educators
- Examine the profiles of educators 5 – 10 years ago, compared to the current profiles
- Provide guidance on the likely profile of family day care educators in the future
- Explore the elements of family day care that are attractive to current and future educators
- Understand the barriers to a career in family day care for educators
- Determine target audiences or populations of potential educators
- Provide recommendations on overcoming the barriers to entry
- Understand the implications for recruiting the next generation of family day care educators



## Methodology

The research is based on four stages.

### 1. Literature Review

Initially, a review of the literature was undertaken to gather background information on the family day care sector. Reports covering the profile of the sector, regulatory framework and the factors impacting quality in family day care and educator experiences were examined.

### 2. Co-ordination Unit Interviews

Interviews were then conducted with three approved family day care co-ordination units. Discussions were focussed on understanding the demographic profile of educators at each service, co-ordination unit staff perceptions of the motivations behind educators' choice of family day care as a career, and their understanding of the challenges faced by educators.

### 3. Focus Groups

In order to further examine the awareness, perceptions and attractiveness of family day care as a profession, two focus groups were also conducted. Focus group participants were students of early childhood education and care or individuals working in an alternative early childhood education and care setting.

Voice recordings of the interviews and focus groups have been professionally transcribed, and the themes that emerged were used as the basis for preparation of the quantitative survey instrument that forms the foundation of this research.

### 4. Quantitative Educator Survey

Quantitative data for the research was collected via an online survey, distributed to 10,096 family day care educators across Australia. All educators invited to participate in the survey were current or past members of Family Day Care Australia.

The survey was conducted between 13 and 30 November 2018. An initial invitation to participate, as well as two reminders, were sent via email during the fieldwork period.

A total of 1,351 family day care educators, 1,288 of whom were current educators, responded, providing a 13.4% response rate.

## Analysis Approach

To understand the changing demographics, motivations and preferences of family day care educators, the research data has been analysed through the lens of an educators length of time in the sector. Particular emphasis has been given to early career stage educators to ensure a focus on the current motivations for becoming a family day care educator. Feedback provided by mid and late career educators is used primarily for comparison purposes, or to understand changes over time. Results have also been examined by educator age to ensure consideration of the motivations and needs based on life stage.

Educators have been segmented into three groups, based on their tenure as a family day care educator. Segments align with those used in the 2010 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census.<sup>3</sup>

- Early career educators (0-3 experience)
- Mid career educators (4-10 years experience)
- Late career educators (Over 10 years experience)

## Segment Sample Framework

The table below provides a summary of the career stage and age breakdown of the research sample.

Results have been weighted to reflect the current age composition of family day care educators as outlined in the Family Day Care Sector Profile Report December 2018.<sup>1</sup> All percentages referred to throughout the report reflect the weighted proportions. (See Appendix).

	Total	CAREER STAGE		
		Early (0-3 Years)	Mid (4-10 Years)	Late (Over 10 Years)
< 29 years	10%	22%	4%	1%
30-39 years	25%	40%	29%	4%
40-49 years	32%	26%	43%	29%
Over 50 years	32%	12%	24%	67%

## Sample Segments

Total of 1,288 respondents who are current educators.





03

Educator Profile

# Australia's family day care workforce

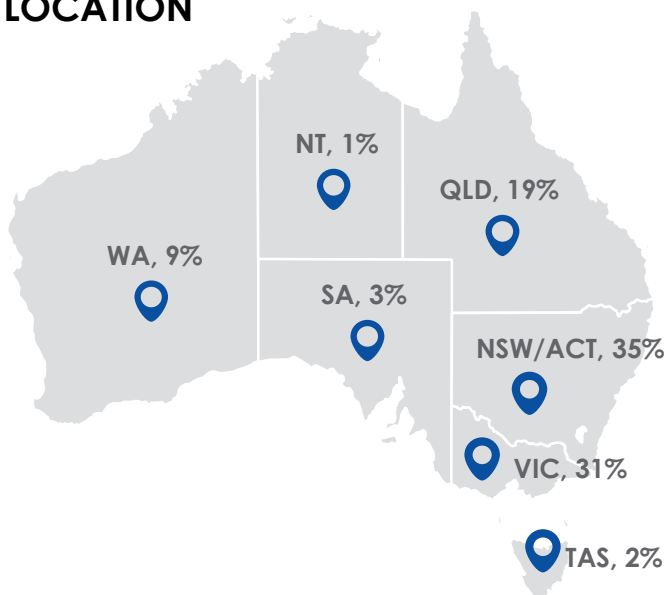
Overall, in December 2018 FDCA reported a total of 536 family day care services and 14,508 educators.<sup>1</sup> This is down from 18,541 at the end of December 2017.<sup>2</sup>

## Location

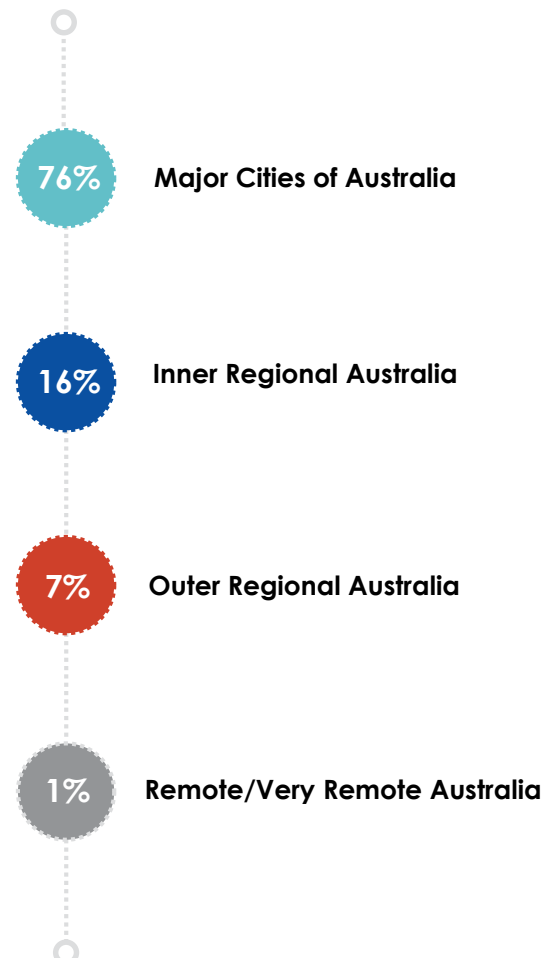
The majority of educators are based in the largest states of New South Wales (35%), Victoria (31%) and Queensland (19%). A further 9% are in Western Australia, 3% in South Australia and 2% in Tasmania.

According to FDCA figures, the majority of family day care educators (76%) in December 2018 are based in major cities in Australia. A further 16% are located in Inner Regional Australia and 7% in Outer Regional Australia.

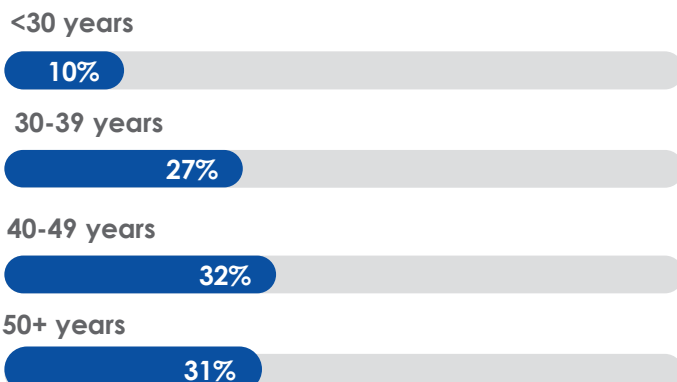
## LOCATION



## REGION



## AGE





## Age

While many aspects of the demographic characteristics of family day care educators have changed over time, the age profile of educators has remained reasonably consistent over the last decade.

In December 2018, Family Day Care Australia reported that 28% of educators were aged between 30 and 39, 31% were aged between 40-49 years old and 32% were aged over 50. Few educators (8%) are younger than 30.

This is broadly consistent with the age profile of survey respondents, as well as that reported in the 2010 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census.<sup>3</sup>

	2018 Survey	2010 Census
< 30 years	10%	8%
30-39 years	25%	28%
40-49 years	32%	31%
50+ years	32%	32%

## Education and Qualifications of Family Day Care Educators

The educational qualifications of survey respondents reflect the requirement introduced with the National Quality Framework in 2012, namely that all family day care educators are at least working towards or holding at least Certificate III level qualifications in early childhood education and care.

Thirty nine percent (39%) of survey respondents hold Certificate III qualifications, and a further 4% are working towards the minimum qualification. This is slightly up from 36% and 3% respectively, as reported in the National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

Positively, more than half of survey respondents have higher qualifications in early childhood education and care. Forty nine percent (49%) hold Diploma level qualifications, while 5% hold a Bachelors Degree or higher. Again, this is higher than in 2010 when 16% held Diploma and 7% Bachelor Degree or higher qualifications.

	2018 Survey	2010 Census
Working towards Certificate III	4%	3%
Certificate III	39%	36% *
Diploma	49%	16% **
Bachelors Degree	5%	2%
Masters Degree	1%	5%

\* Includes Certificate III/IV

\*\* Includes Diploma/Advanced Diploma

## Length of Service

While there has been a decline in the proportion of educators who have worked in the sector for over 10 years, on average, the educators who participated in the research have been working in family day care for 8.7 years.

Thirty seven percent (37%) of educators have been working in the sector for less than 4 years, 34% have been family day care educators for between 4 and 10 years and a further 30% have worked in family day care for over 10 years.

	2018 Survey	2010 Census
0-3 years	37%	22%
4-10 years	34%	33%
Over 10 years	30%	45%

## Prior Experience of Family Day Care Educators

As well as higher educational attainment, the professionalisation of family day care is also evidenced by the prior experience of early career educators, with a higher proportion having previously worked in other early childhood settings than in the past.

Nearly half (45%) of early career educators who responded to the survey had worked in a long day care setting and 12% in a kindergarten or pre-school prior to becoming a family day care educator. This compares to just 16% of late career stage educators with long day care experience and 4% with experience in a kindergarten or pre-school, and is a significant increase.

	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
Long day care centre	45%	33%	16%
Kindergarten / Pre-school	12%	10%	4%
School based early learning centre	2%	3%	0%
Primary school	8%	5%	4%
Not previously employed	20%	24%	20%
Other	28%	37%	62%

\*Multiple response question

### Own Children

Overall, 86% of family day care educators have their own children. One in five (20%) currently have pre-school aged children, while 44% had pre-school aged children when they first became a family day care educator.

While feedback from co-ordination units suggest that being able to work while at home with young children remains a major motivation for new family day care educators, this may be changing as there has been an increase in the proportion of educators entering family day care prior to having their own children. While 60% of long term educators indicated that they had pre-school aged children when they first became an educator this falls to just 32% of early career educators.

	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
Had pre-school children when became an FDC educator	32%	43%	60%
Had children when became an FDC educator	77%	90%	93%

### Home Ownership and Financial Considerations

Reflecting national home ownership statistics <sup>4</sup>, the proportion of family day care educators who own their own home is declining. While 88% of long term educators own their own home, this falls to 65% of early career educators with less than 3 years experience.

Declining home ownership is a major barrier to starting a career as a family day care educator. Interviews with co-ordination units indicated that housing is one of the major obstacles to recruitment of new family day care educators. Obtaining landlord approval to use a rental dwelling to run a family day care business is often problematic. The cost to meet compliance standards also discourages those without secure tenancy from setting up as a family day care educator.

Data also reflects the importance of stability of housing with 79% of educators having lived in their current residence for over 3 years. In further signs of change, however, only 61% of those who have become an educator in the last 3 years have lived at their current residence for over 3 years.

	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
Own your home	65%	78%	88%
Rent your home	29%	19%	9%
Other	6%	3%	3%



# 04

## Educators' Values, Attributes and Perceptions

# Educators' values, attributes and perceptions

To create a profile of family day care educators in Australia, the research sought to understand both the perceived competencies of educators, and importance of various professional and work related factors. How do they like to work? What do they value? What do they perceive as their competencies and needs?

This section presents findings around the personal values, attitudes and personality traits of family day care educators. Interestingly, family day care educators share many common characteristics, which have changed little over time.

## Educators are Confident in their Ability to Provide Quality Care

The educational attainment and experience of family day care educators is evident in their confidence in their ability to provide high quality education and care. Overall 95% believe they have the right skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the children in their care. This is consistent across all levels of experience and age groups.

Under the National Quality Framework, educators are required to base their educational program on the relevant national learning frameworks which include 'Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Framework for Australia' and 'My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia'.<sup>5</sup> Learning programs should be tailored to the individual developmental needs, abilities, interests and experiences of each child.

Positively, 88% are confident in their ability to develop learning programs for the children in their care. Further, nine in ten (91%) educators indicate that they understand the family day care regulations they need to comply with and 87% believe it is important to comply with rules.

A majority of educators also enjoy designing new programs and experiences for the children they care for. This is particularly apparent amongst early career educators, who are more likely to indicate that they enjoy this aspect of their role than longer term educators (88% compared to 80%). The attraction of being able to design their own programs is also evident in early career educators' reasons for joining the family day care sector.

**Table 1: Educator reflections on their skills, preferences and support expectations**  
% Agree / Strongly Agree

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
I have the right skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the children in my care	95%	95%	96%	95%
I understand the family day care regulations I need to comply to with	91%	89%	92%	92%
I am confident in my ability to develop learning programs for the children in my care	88%	88%	88%	88%
I expect my service to allow me to choose my own hours of work	88%	83% ↓*	91%	90%
I want the ability to set my own fees	85%	84%	84%	86%
I enjoy designing new programs and experiences for the children in my care	84%	88%	85%	80%
I am confident in my ability to learn new administrative systems and processes	82%	83%	85%	76% ↓
I expect my co-ordination unit to allow me to make my own decisions about my business	79%	75%	81%	82%
I feel confident taking children out into the community and on day to day activities	79%	75%	80%	82%
It is important that my coordination unit has a visible presence in the community	67%	64%	69%	69%
It is important my coordination unit organise regular group activities with other educators	44%	45%	46%	41%
I need regular support from my coordination unit	39%	42%	43%	29% ↓

\* Significantly higher/lower than total

Family day care also enables educators to provide children with experiences in the community. While a majority of educators (79%) feel confident taking children out into the community and on day to day activities, there are differences based on experience. Despite being less likely than early career educators to agree it has a positive impact on care quality, experienced educators (82%) are more likely to feel confident taking children out into the community than those newer to the role (75%).

### Educators Value Flexibility

Overwhelmingly, family day care educators value flexibility. Family day care offers a more flexible model of early childhood education and care and nearly nine in ten (89%) educators surveyed indicated that flexibility in their working life is important to them.

While few rate flexibility as the main reason they enter the sector, flexibility ranks higher than all other factors when asked what they most like about working as a family day care educator. Eighty eight percent (88%) of educators agree that work life balance is important to them, and many mention the benefits of flexible working times, days and hours that working as a family day care educator affords them.

Flexibility was also the biggest theme when investigating the factors that educators believe have the biggest impact on the quality of care they are able to provide the children in their care. Nearly two thirds (61%) of educators indicated that flexibility of daily activities and routines to adapt to children's interest and energy levels has a positive impact on the quality of early childhood education and care. While it is interesting to note that this falls to 53% of early career educators and is perceived as important to fewer younger educators, it remains the most often rated quality determinant by all educators.

**Table 2: Educator attitudes to working environment and conditions**  
% Agree / Strongly Agree

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
Flexibility is important; sometimes things do not go to plan	89%	88%	89%	90%
Work life balance is important to me	88%	88%	90%	87%
I believe that it is important to comply with rules	87%	88%	87%	85%
Control over my work environment is important to me	79%	80%	76%	80%
I have always wanted to work with children	77%	78%	79%	73%
I like to be of service to others	77%	76%	75%	79%
I like to make my own decisions about when and how I do my work	72%	73%	72%	71%
I like to have clear guidelines on how tasks should be performed	70%	71%	69%	70%
I would leave a job if it did not provide me with a sense of satisfaction or achievement	69%	71%	69%	65%
I like to work independently	69%	63%	70%	74%
I prefer working with children than adults	66%	61%	69%	67%
I am a planner. I always set objectives and plan my daily activities ahead of time	57%	61%	56%	51%

### **A Desire for Autonomy is Evident Amongst Educators**

Autonomy and control also emerged as important to family day care educators. Eight in ten educators indicated that control over their own work environment is important to them, while 72% believe it is important to be able to make their own decisions about when and how they do their work.

The desire for autonomy and control is evident in educators' expectations of their relationship with their co-ordination unit. While family day care educators are effectively independent small business owners, the degree of autonomy allowed by co-ordination units varies. Some services treat educators as autonomous business owners and offer little support, while others treat educators as 'quasi-employees' determining the children they care for, dictating the hours they work and controlling the fees they charge.<sup>5</sup>

Eighty eight percent (88%) expect their co-ordination unit to allow them to choose their own hours of work and eight in ten (79%) indicated that they expect their co-ordination unit to allow them to make their own decisions about their business. This includes setting their own fees, which was important to 85% of educators.

### **Support from Services is Important to Early Career Educators**

Despite research indicating that professional support from services improves work quality and educator mental health<sup>6</sup> only 39% of educators believe that they need regular support from their co-ordination unit. This is possibly an outcome of educators' tendency towards independence, confidence in their abilities and desire for autonomy over how they run their own business.

Despite this, nearly half (42%) of less experienced educators indicate a need for regular co-ordination unit support. This compares to only 29% of more experienced educators, and suggests a need for services to focus their support on early career educators.

### **Educators Feel Comfortable Working Independently**

While working as a family day care educator can be isolating, 69% of current educators indicated that they like to work independently. Similarly, few educators (31%) agreed that they work best in a team and 66% indicated that they prefer working with children than adults.

The desire to work independently increases with age, with younger educators less likely to indicate a preference for independence. This reflects feedback from focus group discussions with students of early childhood education and care that it takes a particular type of person to be a family day care educator. While most of those we spoke to were studying or working in early childhood education and care because they enjoy working with children, most found the idea of working alone with children all day daunting. Some were concerned about the risks of working alone, while others feared they would miss the interaction with colleagues.

Consequently, we believe this to be one of the most important identifying factors of those suited to working in family day care as those who need to interact with others on a day-to-day basis are unlikely to enjoy work as a family day care educator.



### **Intrinsic Job Satisfaction is More Important than Financial Reward**

Over three quarters (77%) of educators revealed that they have always wanted to work with children. Most family day care educators (77%) also indicate a desire to be of service to others. This is reflected in verbatim feedback from educators. A significant proportion of feedback about what they like most about being a family day care educator mentions the joys of working with children and the strong bonds they are able to form with them.

While financial reward is obviously an integral part of any job, over half (55%) of educators indicate that job satisfaction is more important to them than financial reward. Further, over two thirds (69%) of educators suggest that they would leave a job if it did not provide them with a sense of achievement or satisfaction.

Interestingly early career stage educators are more likely (58%) than experienced educators (50%) to rate job satisfaction as more important than financial reward. They are also more likely to suggest that they would seek out a career change if they were not satisfied in their role.

**95%**

Believe they have the right skills & experience to meet the needs of children in their care

**91%**

Understand the family day care regulations they need to comply to

**88%**

Are confident in their ability to develop learning programs for children



# 05

## Educator Perceptions of Quality Care

# Educator perceptions of quality care

As well as understanding the personal attributes and needs of educators, participants were asked to indicate which factors they thought had the biggest impact on the quality of care they are able to provide to children.

Reflecting a theme throughout the research, educators overwhelmingly believe that the ability to offer flexible daily activities and programs that can be adapted to children's interest and energy levels have the most positive impact on the quality of care provided. This is consistent across educators of all ages and experience levels.

Opinions surrounding the other influences on the quality of care, however, appear to be changing and vary based on educator experience levels. Experienced educators are more likely to believe environmental factors, such as care being provided in small groups and in a home environment, are the most important determinants of care quality. By comparison, new entrants to family day care indicate that learning programs that are tailored to each child and that provide children with some choice in the daily activities have the most positive impact on the quality of early childhood education and care.

## Flexibility

When investigating the factors that educators believe have the biggest impact on the quality of care they are able to provide the children in their care, flexibility was once again the biggest theme.

Nearly two thirds (61%) of educators indicated that flexibility of daily activities and routines to adapt to children's interest and energy levels has a positive impact on the quality of early childhood education and care. While it is interesting to note that this falls to 53% of early career educators and is perceived as important to fewer younger educators, it remains the most often rated quality determinant by all educators.

	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
Flexibility of daily activities / routines to adapt to children's interest /energy levels	53%↓*	64%	67% ↑
Learning programs that are tailored to suit each child	35%	30%	30%
Small group environments	24% ↓	30%	38% ↑
Children being in a home environment	24% ↓	28%	37% ↑
Relationships with other children	32%	29%	21% ↓
Child-centred learning that provides children with some choice in their daily activities	34% ↑	24%	19% ↓
The skills and experience of the educator	21%	25%	24%
Children being able to experience a wide range of outdoor activities	22%	21%	22%
Activities in the community that provide opportunities for children to learn new things	24% ↑	18%	14% ↓
Stable adult relationships	14%	18%	14%
Structured routines and daily activities	16%	12%	14%

\* Q. In your opinion, which of the following have the most positive impact on the quality of early childhood education and care? Multiple Response Question.

\* Significantly higher/lower than total



### **Educational Approach**

Learning programs that are tailored to each child are viewed as having a positive impact on the quality of early childhood education and care provided by many educators. Nearly a third (32%) of educators believe that child focussed learning programs are one of the most important quality indicators. This is consistent across educators of all ages, and with varying degrees of experience.

However, there is distinction in the views of newer educators when compared to their more experienced counterparts. Early career stage educators are more likely than more experienced family day care educators to believe that children benefit from having choice in their activities (34% compared to 19%). Similarly, younger educators value child centred learning more than their older counterparts.

### **Learning Environment**

Small group care is seen as one of the most important factors impacting the quality of care by 30% of educators. Being in a home environment was also seen as an important indicator of quality. Twenty nine percent (29%) of educators ranked being cared for in a home environment as having a positive impact on the quality of early education and care.

Again there was a clear distinction in the importance placed on environmental factors by educators. While those in the later stages of their career tended to place high importance on the children being in a home environment (37%) and in small groups (38%), these were seen as important by fewer early career family day care educators (both 24%). Younger educators are also less likely to rate home based care and small groups as having the most positive impact on the quality of care.

### **Relationships with Other Children**

The quality of relationships with other children was also seen as having a positive impact on the quality of early childhood education and care by many educators. Twenty eight percent (28%) of educators who participated in the survey believe these relationships are important quality indicators.

Importantly this rises to 32% of new family day care educators, while only 21% of long term educators rate indicated that relationships with other children were amongst the top three factors that have the most positive aspect on care quality.



06

Becoming a Family  
Day Care Educator

# Motivations for Becoming an Educator

To examine the reasons behind why educators decided to pursue a career in the sector, respondents were asked to provide unprompted free text feedback about why they decided to become a family day care educator. They were then asked to rank attributes that were considered likely to be important in their decision to become an educator.

The key reasons given by respondents for starting a career as a family day care educator are discussed below.

## Ability to Work from Home with their Own Children

Overall 47% of educators indicated that their main reason for deciding to work in family day care was to be able to work and earn an income while at home with their own children. This was also a strong theme amongst verbatim comments. Over four in ten educators indicated that one of the factors in their decision to pursue a career in family day care was to suit their family and lifestyle commitments.

Experienced educators were more inclined to indicate that family considerations were important when starting their family day care career than those who have joined the profession more recently. Two thirds of experienced educators (64%) gave this as their main reason for becoming an educator, with many indicating that “at that time I had a small child and it was a job that I could do and be with my own child”.

While this appears to be falling as the main reason for joining the family day care sector, over a third of early educators (37%) still indicated that their main reason for becoming an educator was to be able to stay at home with their own children. While two thirds of early career educators indicated they did not have pre-school aged children when they joined the profession, this represents a significant motivator for those early career educators who did have pre-school aged children (32%).

**Table 4: Primary Motivations for Becoming a Family Day Care Educator**

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
To be able to work and have an income while at home with my own children	47%	37% ↓*	43%	64% ↑
I was working in childcare, but was not satisfied working in a centre-based environment	9%	13% ↑	8%	4% ↓
I wanted to use my skills and knowledge to develop individual care programs for children	9%	12%	10%	5% ↓
I wanted to work with children in small groups	9%	7%	10%	9%
I wanted to work from home	7%	9%	8%	5%
I wanted to run my own home-based business	5%	6%	6%	4%
I was working in another industry and wanted to work with children	5%	5%	5%	4%

'Q. Which of the following were most important in your decision to become a family day care educator?  
Ranking Question Type. % Ranked No 1

\* Significantly higher/lower than total

### **Dissatisfaction Working in a Centre-Based Environment**

Dissatisfaction working in a centre-based environment was the second most common reason educators decided to start a career in family day care (9%). While significantly lower than the proportion who chose the career to be with their own children, it is growing as a motivation with 13% of early career educators giving this as their main reason for joining the sector.

While fewer respondents (6%) mentioned this reason in unprompted free text feedback, various frustrations educators have faced while working in a centre-based environment were cited. Most prominent amongst educators' frustrations in working in a centre based environment is the large number of children. One educator suggested that she was frustrated in a long day care centre with "40 kids in my room", while for another the workload was too much with "15 babies / 4 staff or 30 toddlers / 5 staff".

Others raised the quality of care able to be provided in an environment with so many children. Several educators indicated that "children and families were numbers" and that they had "no time for developing relationship due to high numbers".

Some educators related that quality of care was affected by set routines and structures, and craved more flexibility in the way they were able to care for the children. Mentions included that educators wanted "to offer quality of care unlike a child care centre which I think is like a boot camp" and craved "flexibility with my own kids routine".

Interestingly, newer family day care educators are more likely to have had prior experience in an early childhood setting than those who became educators more than 10 years ago. Close to half (45%) of early career educators have previously worked in a long day centres, suggesting that educators are increasingly being drawn from alternative early childhood education and care settings.

### **Ability to Offer Personal, Tailored Education and Care**

Many educators are also attracted to family day care as it offers them the opportunity to use their skills and knowledge to develop individual care programs for children. Nearly one in ten educators ranked this as their most important motivation for entering the sector, and 11% referred to this in their verbatim comments describing their reasons for becoming family day care educator.

Feedback suggests that those in the earlier stages of their career (12%) are more driven to commence a career as a family day care educator because of the ability to offer a tailored, personalised service than seasoned educators (5%). Early career stage educators appear more attracted to the opportunity of providing a quality learning environment by providing "quality care in a small group home environment" and enjoy working closely with children to develop their unique skills. They often refer to the ability family day care offers to provide a "relationship based service" whilst maintaining their own teaching philosophy.

Again, these preferences are possibly reflected in the increasing proportion of educators drawn from alternative early childhood education and care settings and provide focus for promotion of family day care as an alternative form of care.

### A Desire to Work with Children in Small Groups

Another reason for deciding to pursue a career as a family day care educator was a the desire to work with children in small groups. Nine percent (9%) of educators ranked this as their number one reason for deciding to become a family day care educator.

More broadly, 39% of unprompted verbatim feedback suggests that simply working with children was the reason they became a family day care educator. To some educators wanting to work with children in a family day care setting was characterised as building strong emotional connections with the children, their families and the community. Comments suggested that family day care was unique in that the small groups meant that “strong relationships can be built between the child and educator and parents” and that “family day care is an excellent option to help the community”.

Others wanted to experience working with children to watch and help them grow. Many educators simply indicated that they “enjoy looking after children and love being able to see them grow and learn over time” while others suggested being fulfilled by the “the joy of helping children to reach their own potential and develop self esteem”.

### Working from Home and Self Employment

The autonomy and independence of self-employment and working from home was a less common motivation for commencing a career as a family day care educator. Working from home and self employment were only ranked as the most important reasons for becoming an educator by 7% and 5% of respondents respectively. Only 6% recalled self-employment as a top of mind response when asked.

Early stage career educators find the self-employment aspect of family day care more appealing (9%) than experienced educators (3%). Those educators who mentioned self employment in verbatim feedback indicated that the autonomy allows them to be “treated equally” whilst gaining “flexible working hours and the ability to essentially run your own service”.

## Main Reason Educators Started Working in Family Day Care



“To be able to work from home while raising my own children. I’d also always wanted to work with children.”

— *Early Career Stage*





# Barriers to Becoming a Family Day Care Educator

There are several requirements to set up a business as a family day care educator. Firstly, interested individuals must apply through an approved family day care service, and meet the policies set by the service. They must ensure they have the minimum Certificate III educational qualifications in early childhood education and care. They must meet the regulatory, compliance and safety requirements enshrined in the NQF, and then they must work with the service to enrol children.

Given the increased regulatory and administration burden over recent years, the challenges family day care educators face in setting up their business were canvassed by the survey. Discussions with co-ordination units, students and current long day care educators also focussed on the potential barriers to pursuing a career in family day care. This section summarises the feedback about these challenges.

## Cost

Financial considerations are one of the biggest challenges educators face in setting up a family day care business. Thirty eight percent (38%) of educators indicated that cost was the biggest challenge in setting up their business.

Cost concerns were most often mentioned by those who had more recently become an educator, with 44% of respondents who had become an educator in the past three years rating set up costs as the most challenging aspect of becoming an educator. This compares to only 30% of long term educators. Younger educators also feel the cost burden more acutely than older, more established counterparts, suggesting that financial assistance could be a way to attract more educators to the sector.

The cost to set up as a family day care educator was also discussed by current early childhood education and care educators and students, with some participants suggesting that they wouldn't be able to "afford the facilities...all the extra toys and things they need". Another student indicated that "it would probably be something I would do if I was a bit older as I don't really have the economic stability"

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
The cost to set up a business as a family day care educator	38%	44% ↑*	38%	30% ↓
Finding enough children to fill the hours I want to work	33%	36%	36%	26% ↓
Balancing family and business responsibilities	33%	32%	30%	37%
Understanding the regulatory and educational programming requirements	31%	24% ↓	35%	38% ↑
The administration and knowledge/skills to set up and run a business in family day care	27%	32%	27%	22% ↓
Service and regulatory requirements for the care environment (home)	26%	22%	28%	29%
Competition from other childcare providers	14%	12%	17%	13%
Completing the mandatory qualifications and certifications	9%	11%	8%	8%
Meeting the selection criteria required by a family day care service	7%	6%	9%	6%
As a tenant, negotiating with the landlord	6%	7%	7%	3% ↓

<sup>1</sup>Q. What was the hardest part in setting up your family day care business?  
Multiple Response Question.

\* Significantly higher/lower than total

### **Demand**

Finding enough children to fill the hours educators want to work was the next most often cited challenge in setting up a family day care business. A third of educators (33%) suggested that they found it difficult to fill their available time. Again, more recent educators were the most likely to indicate that they had trouble finding enough children to care for.

Lack of demand appears to be due primarily to lack of awareness, with many educators indicating that “most people don’t know what family day care is unless their children have attended a family day care”. Competition from long day care centres also appears to be a factor, with some educators suggesting that there are ‘too many long day care centres opening up in my vicinity’.

### **Work Life Balance**

Interestingly, a third (33%) of educators indicated that balancing family and business responsibilities is one of the challenges they encountered in setting up a family day care business.

While this appears to conflict with feedback from educators that flexibility is one of the major attractions of being a family day care educator, the role does appear to impact the work life balance some educators are able to achieve. Verbatim feedback from survey respondents refers to the long days educators must work and the difficulties they encounter balancing work and private life due to “the extra hours for cleaning, admin and documentation”. Others mentioned the challenge of “balancing time between being an educator and being a wife and mum”.

Work life balance was also perceived as one of the main barriers to becoming an family day care educator by students and those working in other early childhood education and care settings. Some focus group participants felt that compliance requirements would encroach on their home environment. Other discussions delved into the difficulties participants felt they would encounter in trying to separate their work from their private life when working from home.

### **Risk and Compliance**

Understanding the regulatory and compliance requirements when setting up their family day care business was a challenge identified by 31% of current educators. Positively this was less of a challenge for early career educators (24%).

Many early childhood education and care educators currently working in long day care centres or schools were concerned about the risk involved in being a family day care educator. Participants in the focus group indicated they felt it was “a lot of responsibility” and were concerned that “you’re liable for everything”.

### **Isolation**

The isolation of working alone with children is also often seen as a barrier to becoming a family day care educator. While mentioned only occasionally in comments provided by current family day care educators, it was a more common concern amongst those working in other early childhood education and care settings.

One current long day care centre employee suggested that it might “be a little bit lonely” with no-one else there for support or to talk to during the day. Another suggested that “I couldn’t be by myself with children all day” and that they “would want to talk to another adult for five or ten minutes”.

### **Housing and Economic Stability**

Another barrier to working as a family day care educator discussed by service representatives and focus group participants was access to suitable long term housing. Co-ordination unit managers spoke of the difficulty some potential educators face in obtaining landlord approval to use their rental home as the base for a family day care business. The costs to set up a home to meet compliance requirements is not insignificant, and so housing stability is also important.

Housing is particularly a barrier to attracting young educators. Early childhood education and care students who participated in focus groups referred to lack of their own housing as a barrier. In the words of one student - “I don’t even have my own house, so I don’t think my parents would be too happy”.

# 07

## Working as a Family Day Care Educator

# What educators enjoy about the role

To provide insight into the role of an educator and ideas for the aspects of family day care that might be attractive to potential educators, the survey investigated what educators most like about their role.

Educators were asked to describe in their own words, unprompted, what they would tell someone who was considering a career in family day care what they most enjoy about the role. They were also asked to rank the most enjoyable aspects of their role as an educator, with factors presented based on our literature review and discussions with services.

## Relationships with Children

For many family day care educators, their work with children was clearly the area of their professional lives that brings them the most satisfaction. Enjoyment working with children was overwhelming the aspect of the role most frequently mentioned by respondents in unprompted feedback. Over half (51%) stated that working with children is the most enjoyable part of being a family day care educator. The strong bonds and good relationships they have with the children was also ranked as the most enjoyable aspect of the role by 39% of educators.

Educators spoke warmly and their passion for children was evident. According to one educator "the reward is the children, the affection they show, the joy on their faces, to watch them grow and learn", while another enthused that "(the children) really are great company and we have the most wonderful conversations!"

Many mentioned the satisfaction obtained from having a positive influence on the lives of the children in their care. Comments referred to the satisfaction they get from "watching the children in my care grow and develop" and that it is "the best job in the world to be able to watch children grow and develop into happy confident little people",

The quality of the relationships educators develop with the children and their families was also a strong theme. Many mentioned that they like "that you are able to develop strong lasting bonds with children and their families" and "the children become a part of your family".

Interestingly, seasoned educators mentioned this aspect of their role more than early career educators. Specifically they think that building special bonds with the children and their families makes for a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
The strong bonds and good relationships I have with the children	39%	34%	39%	43%
Flexible working times, days, hours	18%	19%	17%	17%
The quality of care I am able to provide to the children	16%	15%	18%	16%
I am able to develop my own approach to early years learning programs	8%	11%	8%	4%
The flexibility to adapt my program depending on the needs of the children	6%	6%	6%	4%
The relationships I have with the families I work with	5%	5%	5%	6%
I feel empowered to do what I think is best for the children in my care	4%	5%	3%	6%

'Q. What do you like most about working as a family day care educator?  
Ranking Style Question. % Ranked No 1

## **Flexibility**

Flexibility was another major theme to arise from the feedback about what educators most enjoy about their role. The flexible working times, days and hours available to family day care educators was ranked as the aspect educators most like about the role by 18% of educators.

Flexibility was also mentioned by 28% of respondents in the unprompted free text feedback they provided about what they would tell others they enjoy most about working as a family day care educator. Many educators provided feedback that indicated that they “appreciate the flexibility to set your own days and hours that work around your own family.”

Educators provided a variety of comments to describe ways in which they perceived flexibility. For a majority, flexibility meant being able to look after their own children while they work. Many educators indicated that they enjoy the “flexibility of working from home while minding your own kids” and “being able to be at home with my own children and earn some extra money to contribute to the household.”

Flexibility to others meant simply being able to choose their own hours, with many educators appreciative that they are “able to work the days and hours that suit you”.

The flexibility educators have in programming daily activities was also mentioned, with many respondents enjoying that they are “able to set my own schedule and activities” and have “the flexibility everyday to change and develop a program to meet the needs of the children in care.” One educator suggested that “I like this job because I can be flexible and depending on the children's interest I can organise any excursion as they want.”

Others simply liked the flexibility they are able to offer the families they support. Several educators mentioned that they like “being able to be flexible and meet the needs of the families”.

## **Quality of Care Educators Are Able to Provide**

The quality of care educators are able to provide was ranked as the most enjoyable part of the role by 16% of educators, and was often referred to in unprompted feedback.

Quality care was often associated with the individual relationships that educators are able to develop with each child. Educators referred to the benefit of being in “the unique position of knowing the children so well in your care that you can plan and program effectively and tailor it to have the most successful outcome.” Others suggested that the quality of care was improved because they have “more one on one time with each child” and so are able to “give much more personal attention to children”.

Small groups were also seen as an indicator of care quality. Several educators suggested that “working with small groups of children allows you to really focus on their learning” and that it allows them to offer personalised care to children when compared to “a long day care centre where children are in a room full of others”. Others suggested that they can “implement activities into the programme that are important and much easier with smaller numbers of children”.

Being in a home environment was also seen as leading to higher quality care. Educators suggested that they “like that it is more personal with the children and families in a home environment”.

### **Able to Develop Own Approach to Early Years Learning Program**

While bound by the NQF approved learning frameworks, the ability to be able to develop their own approach to the early years learning program was ranked as the most rewarding part of the job by 8% of educators. This increases to 11% of early career educators. It was also often mentioned in verbatim feedback by respondents, particularly early career family day care educators.

Educators appreciate the flexibility to design programs specifically for individual children. Many mentioned that they enjoy that they “can design and implement flexible programs in relation to children’s individual needs” and that family day care “provides you the freedom to program to the needs of each individual child.”

The professionalisation of the workforce is also leading to an increase in educators attracted to family day care as it provides them the ability “to create and implement a program that reflects my philosophy” and “to develop programs that are unique”. One educator summed it up as having “the freedom to be able create a wonderful nurturing learning environment using my own philosophy and ideas.”

Access to nature and community based learning activities were also attractive to many educators. Comments referred to the joys of “being able to take children out into the community for activities and outings” and “embrace nature education”.

## **What Educators Most Like About Their Role**

**39%**

**Enjoy working with and developing bonds with children**

“The close relationship you develop with the children and their family is great”

**18%**

**Like the flexible work arrangements**

“Flexible hours and able to work around my children and others needs ”

**16%**

**The quality of care I am able to provide**

“I enjoy working with children in a small group where you can devote more individual attention to each child.



*“The reward is the children, the affection they show, the joy on their faces, to watch them grow and learn”*

— Mid Career Stage



# The challenges faced by educators

While educators overwhelmingly describe the joys of working with children and building quality relationships with the children and their families, existing research also refers to the many challenges educators face. Among other things, prior studies discuss the impact of low wages, high responsibility, being undervalued by society, lack of support from family day care co-ordination units, government requirements and the conflict between being self-employed but with limited power over how their business operates.<sup>6</sup>

To investigate the challenges current educators face, and whether it varies based on educators age and time in the sector, educators were asked to describe in their own words what they thought were the major challenges facing educators in Australia. They were then asked to rank various challenges they face in their own role as an educator, with factors presented based on our literature review and discussions with services.

## Difficulty Taking Time Off When Running a Home-Based Small Business

The majority of family day care educators are engaged by services as independent contractors and therefore must fulfil all administrative and business requirements of a self employed person. As for many small business owners difficulty taking time off or having holidays is often difficult and, accordingly, it was the most often selected challenge of being an educator. Twenty eight percent (28%) of respondents indicated this was the most challenging aspect of their role. While only selected by 19% of late career educators, it rises to 33% of early career educators.

Educators mentioned the difficulties that arise due to lack of back up. Comments included that “there is no back up for parents when we are sick or want time off” and that they find it “very difficult to manage when I have taken time off or I have been unwell”.

While the services we spoke to indicated that they work with educators to find other educators to care for their children so they can take time off, the difficulty of having to account for their own employment entitlements was rated as the biggest difficulty of being an educator by 10% of respondents. Comments provided by educators also referred to the financial consequence of taking time off as they “only earn when we work, (there is) no holiday pay or sick leave”.

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
Difficulty taking time off / having holidays	28%	33%	30%	19% ↓*
The increasing amount of administration required to run my business	20%	11% ↓	17%	35% ↑
Having to account for my own employment entitlements as part of running my business	10%	12%	10%	8%
Lack of recognition as a qualified professional	7%	5%	8%	8%
Fluctuating demand for family day care / Keeping the child care places I have available filled	5%	6%	4%	5%
Being alone with the children a lot of the time / Being isolated from others	4%	7% ↑	3%	3%
Not enough income	4%	4%	6%	2%
Compliance with quality standards / regulations	4%	2%	4%	6%
Difficulty balancing the needs of my own family and my role as a family day care educator	4%	3%	5%	3%
Working with special needs or 'at risk' children	3%	3%	3%	2%
Restrictive rules imposed by my FDC coordination unit or service	3%	2%	3%	4%
The costs associated with running my business	3%	4%	2%	2%
Lack of support from my FDC coordination unit or service	2%	2%	2%	1%

Q. 'What are the most difficult aspects of your role as a family day care educator?'  
Ranking Question Type % Ranked No. 1

\* Significantly higher/lower than total

### **Increasing Administrative and Compliance Burden**

The increasing amount of paperwork and the administrative burden was overwhelmingly the biggest challenge discussed by educators in verbatim survey feedback. It was also ranked as the biggest challenge of working as an educator by 20% of respondents, while compliance with quality standards and regulations was rated the biggest challenge by a further 4% of educators.

Educators frequently cited "the ever increasing paperwork". Many suggested that "the sheer amount of paperwork involved is overwhelming" and that "keeping up to date with programming, business and health and safety paperwork requirements" is their biggest challenge.

Other educators referred to "the constant change in regulations" and complained of the difficulty they face in "keeping up with changes in compliance and regulatory requirements". Some educators suggested that the 'changes in laws and regulations impede our ability to provide quality care or remain viable as a business'.

Interestingly, it is more experienced educators (35%) who struggle most with the administrative pressure, with significantly fewer (11%) more recent educators indicating that administration is one of the more difficult aspects of their role.

### **Recognition as a Qualified Professional**

Overall 7% of family day care educators suggested that lack of recognition of family day care educators as a qualified professional is the biggest challenge of their role. Lack of recognition was also a common theme in free text feedback about the difficulties faced by educators.

Educators mentioned the lack of recognition of the important role they perform in the community and complained of feeling undervalued. One educator suggested that they "often feel as though educators are not valued enough in the important role they have and the service they provide to a community."

Many respondents spoke of the lack of appreciation of their qualifications and the professional nature of their role. Respondents consistently re-enforced that they "are trained professionals" and "abide by same rules and regulations as other services." Many others objected that "we are still considered baby sitters".

### **Lack of Awareness, Lack of Demand and Competition from Long Day Care Centres**

Lack of awareness of family day care as a viable childcare option for families was a strong theme throughout the feedback from educators about the challenges they face. Five percent (5%) of educators ranked fluctuating demand for family day care as their biggest challenge, suggesting it is difficult to keep the child care places they have filled.

Respondents suggested that lack of demand for their service is because family day care has a low profile and many comments referred to the "lack of understanding that the general public have of the service". Suggesting a need for greater promotion of the service, others spoke of the lack of "understanding from the greater community about what we actually do in terms of delivering a program". A focus on the need to promote the unique value provided by family day care was evident in comments from educators who want "recognition that family day care services are as good, if not better, than any long day care service."

The increasing competition from long day care centres was also evident. Many comments indicated that "more and more large childcare centres are opened nowadays" which has an impact on finding children to fill vacancies.

Parental preference for long day care centres for their children was also seen as a challenge by some educators. One respondent commented that "most parents prefer long day care centres than family day care" while another suggested that they struggle with "competition with long day care centres and parents views of 'proper' preschools".

## **Biggest Challenge Faced by Educators in Their Role**

**28%**

**Difficulty taking time off**

"We have no back up for parents when we are sick or want time off"

**20%**

**Increasing administration and compliance**

"The sheer amount of paperwork involved is overwhelming"

**10%**

**Lack of employment entitlements**

"For me personally not receiving the same benefits as other employed people - super, holiday & sick leave."



“Being undervalued. I often feel as though educators are not valued enough in the important role they have and the service they provide to a community. We are trained professionals...” –  
*Early Career Stage*

# Intent to remain a family day care educator

To provide insight into the future retention of family day care educators, the survey examined how long educators intend to work in the industry and key barriers to remaining a family day care educator from those who are reportedly looking for alternative employment.

## Future outlook of Family Day Care educators

Despite recent falls in the number of family day care educators in Australia, a large majority (85%) of the educators who participated in the research have no plans to leave the family day care sector.

Close to one in two respondents (47%) intend to remain an educator as long as they enjoy it. Less experienced educators are more likely to indicate that their intention to stay is contingent on their continued enjoyment (53%) than late stage career educators (35%).

Positively, 38% of respondents indicated that family day care is their career, and that they intend to remain an educator for the foreseeable future. This outlook is more applicable to seasoned educators (48%) than those with less experience (32%).

Not surprisingly, a small proportion intend to retire in the near future. As expected, this is more common amongst experienced educators (12%).

## Barriers to remaining an educator

When educators were asked to specify why they are looking for alternative employment from family day care, just over a third (34%) of respondents indicated that the compliance and administrative burdens are too great.

While many comments from educators indicated that they make a good income as an educator, nearly one in five (18%) indicated that they are looking to leave the sector as they are not making enough money from family day care.

**Table 8. Intent to Remain a Family Day Care Educator**

	Total	Early (0-3 years)	Mid (4-10 years)	Late (10+ years)
I enjoy family day care – I intend to remain an educator as long as I continue to enjoy it	47%	53% ↑ *	50%	35% ↓
Family day care is my career – I intend to remain an educator for the foreseeable future	38%	32% ↓	35%	48% ↑
Not long, as I am nearing retirement	5%	2% ↓	3%	12% ↑
I see family day care as a short-term opportunity to earn income while my children are young	4%	8% ↑	4%	0% ↓
I am currently looking for alternative employment	4%	4%	5%	3%
Other	2%	2%	2%	2%

\* Significantly higher/lower than total



08

Attracting & Assisting  
Educators

# Actions to support educator recruitment

The final section of the research was focussed on generating ideas for attracting the next generation of educators. To do this, educators were asked to describe in their own words, unprompted, up to three practical and achievable actions that FDCA could take to support recruitment of new educators into the sector.

Educators provided many ideas, key among them the need to promote the family day care sector and the service provided by educators. Reflecting earlier feedback, many educators suggested that it was necessary to promote the benefits of family day care widely, both for educators and the children in their care. Educators suggested that promotion should both educate the public about the existence of family day care, as well as demonstrate the positive benefits for children and highlight the differences to alternative forms of early childhood education and care.

Suggestions also focussed on the need for more support, in many forms. Educators suggested that support with administration and compliance would make it easier to both become, and operate as, a family day care educator. Other comments highlighted a need for more training, with suggestions that access to training and resources would be beneficial. One suggestion was made that a mentoring and induction scheme to assist new educators would be helpful.

Relieving the administration burden was another common suggestion. Educators called for 'realistic reporting' and a reduction in 'unnecessary paperwork'. Reflecting feedback throughout the research, educators feel that streamlined administrative processes would remove some barriers to entry.

Financial support was also a strong theme. Many suggestions indicated that new educators need financial support in setting up as a new family day care educator, while others focussed on the need for income stability. One suggested an income guarantee in the early stages of a career in family day care. In response to the challenges surrounding the difficulties associated with taking time off, another educator suggested the establishment of a scheme that allows educators to contribute towards holidays and long service leave.

Many of the suggestions provided by educators are practical, day to day solutions that could be implemented at the co-ordination unit level to provide ongoing support to educators. However, there is also scope for many of the ideas to form the basis of sector wide schemes that could be used to provide practical support to attract and assist educators to establish themselves in the family day care sector. A full transcript of the suggestions has been provided to Family Day Care Australia, and we recommend further review and investigation of the many positive ideas provided by current educators.





## Promote Family Day Care

- “Advertise the positive benefits for children in FDC demonstrating where we are similar and different to centre based care”
- “Advertising to educate people of the advantages and existence of Family Day Care”
- “Advertise constantly and promote the benefits of family day care for the children and educators”



## Provide Support

### Training & Resources

- “Free training, access to free resources”
- “More training and access to webinars”

### Mentoring & Induction

- “...Knowledge and understanding of industry for new educators”
- “Mentoring program”

### Coordination Unit & Services

- “More support from coordinators and schemes...”
- “More support from coordination unit”
- “...Financial support while setting up new FDC”



## Relieve Administration Volume

- “More support around admin in the first year”
- “... I find that I spend way too long on programming, observations, planning and other documentation”
- “Reduce the amount of unnecessary paperwork”



## Financial Support

- “Provide a scheme that allows educators to pay in to for holidays and long service leave...”
- “...Superannuation”
- “Ensure stability of income”
- “Guarantee income for the first 6 months when first starting”





09

Conclusion

# Conclusion

This report offers a call to action. Family day care provides an important alternative form of early childhood education and care for a large number of Australian families. Yet there appears to be a widespread lack of awareness of family day care and of the value provided by the educators who work in the sector. Whether because of this, or due to legislative changes, the increasing administrative and compliance burden or the lack of recognition of the value they provide, educator numbers are declining.

While many professions target young graduates to fill their future talent pool, this will not necessarily work for family day care. There are many barriers to young people setting up a family day care business, including lack of experience, access to suitable housing and financial stability. Consequently, new entrants to the sector tend to be older educators with the majority aged between 30 and 50.

Despite this, there are some very positive signs for the future of family day care. Educators are increasingly qualified and experienced, and many are attracted to family day care from other early childhood education and care settings. The flexibility and personalised model of care it provides appeals to a new generation of educators. Further, the enjoyment and satisfaction educators obtain from working and building relationships with 'their' children was profoundly evident in the feedback.

While individuals who are confident in their abilities and comfortable working alone will remain those most likely to be attracted to working as a family day care educator, there are signs that the professionalisation of the workforce is attracting a new breed of educators. They do not necessarily have children of their own, but rather are qualified professionals looking to use their skills and experience to make a difference to the lives of the children in their care.

With further advocacy and promotion of the profession and the unique skills that educators offer, we are confident that this might continue and grow.

Thanks again to all the educators and family day care co-ordination units who provided their input. We trust that you will find the information in this report interesting and useful and hope that it provides a better understanding of the profile, motivations and challenges of family day care educators in Australia. Most importantly, we hope that it will provide guidance to the sector to attract the next generation of educators so that it can continue to offer this unique and valued service to the families of Australia.

# 10

## Appendix

# Sample Profile

	Sample Size	Total	CAREER STAGE		
			Early (0-3 Years)	Mid (4-10 Years)	Late (10+ Years)
<b>Age *</b>					
<24-29 years	53	10%	22%	4%	1%
30-39 years	242	25%	40%	29%	4%
40-49 years	439	32%	26%	43%	29%
50-65+ years	554	32%	12%	24%	67%
<b>Location</b>					
NSW/ACT	431	35%	34%	33%	39%
VIC	280	32%	33%	35%	26%
QLD	315	19%	19%	19%	20%
WA	125	9%	11%	8%	8%
SA	85	3%	2%	3%	4%
TAS	43	2%	1%	2%	3%
<b>Region</b>					
Inner Regional Town/City	492	39%	38%	42%	36%
Outer Regional Town/City	394	30%	29%	27%	35%
Capital City	291	22%	24%	22%	21%
Remote Area	111	9%	9%	9%	8%
<b>Education</b>					
Working towards a Certificate III	40	4%	8%	2%	1%
Certificate III	539	39%	33%	35%	52%
Diploma	597	49%	50%	54%	41%
Bachelor's Degree	63	5%	6%	6%	3%
Master's Degree	7	1%	0%	1%	1%
Other	42	3%	3%	2%	3%
<b>Employment History (Prior to becoming an Educator)</b>					
Other	587	41%	28%	37%	62%
Long day care centre	381	32%	45%	33%	16%
Not previously employed	246	21%	20%	24%	20%
Kindergarten / Pre-school	107	9%	12%	10%	4%
Primary school	81	6%	8%	5%	4%
School based early learning centre	21	2%	2%	3%	-

\* Results have been weighted to reflect the composition of family day care educators by age, as outlined in the Family Day Care Australia Sector Profile Report December 2018.<sup>1</sup> All percentages reflect the weighted sample proportion.

# Sample Profile

	Sample Size	Total	CAREER STAGE		
			Early (0-3 Years)	Mid (4-10 Years)	Late (10+ Years)
<b>Home ownership</b>					
Home owner	1019	76%	65%	78%	88%
Renting	222	20%	29%	19%	9%
Other	47	4%	6%	3%	3%
<b>Length of Residence</b>					
Less than 1 year	72	7%	14%	5%	1%
1-2 years	134	14%	26%	10%	3%
3-5 years	248	21%	29%	23%	8%
6-10 years	254	21%	19%	30%	13%
More than 10 years	580	38%	13%	32%	75%
<b>Living Arrangements</b>					
Living with a partner / spouse (Children)	707	58%	60%	67%	45%
Living with partner / spouse (No children)	305	21%	17%	16%	32%
Live alone	97	6%	5%	5%	10%
Solo parent, living with children	93	7%	6%	7%	7%
Living with extended family (Children)	25	2%	3%	1%	2%
Living with extended family (No children)	16	1%	2%	1%	1%
Living in a share household with other adults	15	2%	2%	2%	1%
Other	30	3%	5%	1%	3%
<b>Preschool Aged Children (Living at home when career started as an Educator)</b>					
Yes	565	44%	32%	43%	60%
No	723	56%	68%	57%	40%

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PO Box 571 Gosford NSW 2250  
[www.fdca.com.au](http://www.fdca.com.au)

For more information about this report, please contact:  
Michael Farrell, National Policy and Advocacy Manager  
at [michael.farrell@fdca.com.au](mailto:michael.farrell@fdca.com.au)

