

Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system

Submission from
Family Day Care Australia



1. Introduction

1.1 About Family Day Care Australia

Family Day Care Australia (FDCA) is an apolitical, not for profit, the national member association representing 15,270 family day care educators and 567 approved family day care services.¹ Our mission is to represent, support and promote the family day care sector in delivering high quality early childhood and care to more Australian children. Our aim is to ensure the strength and continued growth of the sector in Australia.

1.2 About family day care

Family day care is a form of regulated early childhood education and care (ECEC) that takes place in the educator's home and operates under the National Quality Framework (NQF). Family day care educators are ECEC professionals who provide flexible early childhood education and care across both standard and non-standard hours, including weekends and overnight. Family day care is an option of choice for more than 112,310 families across Australia, responding to parents' desire for a 'home-based' and 'family-like' environment for their children.² Of the 1,287,900 million children who attend approved child care services nationally, approximately 13%, or 167,780 attend family day care settings.³

The family day care sector provides much needed ECEC for Australian families in areas of high disadvantage, with 25.4% of educators providing family day care in areas that are ranked in the two highest deciles on the SEIFA index (representing areas of highest socio-economic disadvantage) and over half of educators (53.4%) being located in areas ranked in the first five deciles of the SEIFA index.⁴ Furthermore, a steady 23 % of family day educators operate in regional and remote areas of Australia. In some of these areas, family day care is the only option available for child care.

Family day care is structurally unique in the ECEC landscape and is essentially a 'satellite' service delivery model. Family day care educators are required to be registered with a family day care 'approved service' that carries responsibility for registering, training, advising and regularly monitoring its educators to ensure quality standards and compliance requirements under the NQF and Families Assistance legislation are met. The approved service administers a 'coordination unit', which employs administrative staff as well as coordinators (field staff) to meet these responsibilities. However educators work independently in their own home and carry the day to day responsibility for delivery of ECEC in accordance with the relevant regulations. FDC services therefore play a co-regulatory role in ensuring the quality of ECEC delivered by educators to the children in their care.

1.3 Current qualification requirements of family day care educators⁵

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) has the legislative responsibility to determine and approve the qualifications that need to be held by early childhood educators under the NQF. Qualifications are regulated because research shows

¹ FDCA Family day care Sector Profile, September 2018

² Lifting Our game – Report on the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, State of Victoria, 2017

³ Department of Education, Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary – March quarter 2018

⁴ FDCA Family day care Sector Profile, September 2018

⁵ Source: www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/requirements/family-day-care-services

that formal early childhood qualifications are positively associated with higher quality education and care programs and interactions with children, leading to better outcomes for children.⁶

Currently all family day care educators must hold or be 'actively working towards' *at least* an approved Certificate III level education and care qualification, except in South Australia, where a family day care educator must hold *at least* an approved Certificate III level education and care qualification.

Family day care coordinators must hold an approved diploma level education and care qualification, although there are some alternative qualifications accepted in Queensland.⁷ It is important to note that these are *minimum* qualification requirements and many family day care educators and coordinators hold higher qualifications.

2. Issues of concern relevant to the expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system

FDCA notes the expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system (the Review) will focus on how the Government's investment in VET could be more effective to provide Australians with the skills they need to be successful throughout their working life; and ensuring Australian businesses, including small and family businesses and businesses in rural and regional areas, have the skills they need to support their business growth.

There are a number of issues that FDCA wishes to bring to the attention of the review committee in relation to the above areas of focus:

2.1 Quality of education and training

Quality education and training enables educators to support the health, safety and wellbeing of young children and to improve their educational and developmental outcomes.⁸ In family day care settings, this is critical as educators are likely to work alone and have responsibility for young children with no or limited supervision on a daily basis.⁹

Concerns about the quality and variability of ECEC training have been already highlighted in two Productivity Commission Reports (2011, 2014). ASQA's 2015 strategic review into training for early childhood education and care in Australia also noted concerns about quality of training, courses being delivered in overly short timeframes, and issues with learning and assessment in workplace environments. ASQA's 2017 strategic review repeated its concerns about unduly short training in the sector and FDCA understands that ASQA continues to audit providers offering the Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care due to concerns over quality of these qualifications.¹⁰ Addressing these issues of quality is critical to maximising the Government's investment in VET as well as ensuring Australians have the skills and knowledge required to successfully gain employment and build a career in the sector. Where RTOs do not have the appropriate knowledge, experience or resources to

⁶ ACECQA submission the Review of the National Vocation and Training Regulator Act 2011 at www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-07/ACECQA_submission.pdf

⁷ For further information, see www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/requirements/family-day-care-services

⁸ Ibid, Note 6

⁹ However family day care service coordinators usually visit educators on a monthly basis.

¹⁰ Ibid, Note 6

deliver quality education and training, confidence in the qualifications on the part of students and employers alike is eroded.

Quality education and training package content is clearly fundamental to quality education and training in ECEC. FDCA notes that SkillsIQ, under the direction of the Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee (IRC) and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), is currently undertaking a detailed review of the six Qualifications and associated 65 Units of Competency in the Children's Education and Care Sector. Through our involvement in this review as a member of the IRC, FDCA has already provided feedback on the Draft 2 materials highlighting a number of deficiencies in the content of the Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, specifically:

- The language of the draft qualification packages appears to be biased towards centre-based education and care settings, with no mention of family day care
- Opportunities for work placement in family day care are not explicitly included or referenced
- As family day care educators are effectively small business owners as well as early childhood education and care professionals, modules regarding running a home-based business would be desirable to support sustainability and growth in the sector.

2.2 Quality and consistency of information about qualifications and employment outcomes

FDCA is aware that currently there is a general lack of awareness among students and VET providers about family day care as a potential employment outcome from a Certificate III or Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care. This needs to be addressed if we are to maximise the potential of the sector to meet families' demand for flexible, home-based education and care now and into the future.

Access to clear and accurate information about course content and potential employment outcomes is essential to meet the need for basic decision making on the part of students. FDCA is aware that the recent review into the national Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 has made a recommendation (Recommendation 16), supported by the Australian Government, that the legislative framework be amended to require RTOs to publish nationally consistent consumer information including, among other things, information on employment outcomes.¹¹ FDCA also supports this recommendation and would be willing to work with the Australian Government to provide the relevant information regarding employment outcomes and tasks in family day care settings.

The current information about career options for Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and Diploma of Childhood Education and Care on the government's myskills.gov.au is, at best, very limited and does not mention family day care educator or co-ordinator as an option.¹² Furthermore, while the information on the Government's Job Outlook website names 'family day care worker' as an employment possibility this is incorrect

¹¹ All eyes on quality – Review of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011, Australian Government Response

¹² See www.myskills.gov.au/courses/details?Code=CHC30113

terminology and the description of this work and the tasks involved are incorrect and misleading.¹³

2.3 Strong and growing demand for early education and care services

The most recent SkillsIQ Industry Skills Forecast for the children's education and care sector identifies strong growth in demand for ECEC services going forward to 2020, due to rising household wealth and the forecast increase in Australia's birth rate. This creates significant challenges for ECEC services, especially in regional and remote areas.¹⁴

Family day care has a unique capacity to meet the diverse and changing needs of Australian children, families and communities and good potential for growth. There is no question that this capacity could be leveraged to meet areas of strong demand, and the service delivery model is particularly well-suited to delivery in regional and remote areas, due to the structure and flexibility of the decentralised or 'satellite' delivery model. However, in order to increase levels of service delivery in regional and remote areas, incentives must be established. This could be achieved by adding the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care to the list of fully subsidised priority courses (for those living in regional and remote areas) or through the addition of the qualification to the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program.

FDCA contends that 2019 is an opportune time for the Australian Government to reassess approaches to supporting the family day care sector, focusing on incentivising entry into the family day sector, higher quality and more flexible and sustainable service delivery. For those wishing to enter the family day care sector, including those who wish to make a career change later in life, achieving high quality outcomes from their training is critical to providing them with a solid foundation for their career; yet, fundamentally, the key barrier of the high cost of qualifications must be addressed if we are to increase numbers of entrants.

3. Recommendations

FDCA recommends that the Review notes the above issues and prioritises the following:

- 1) Improving the quality of content and delivery of Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care training packages to ensure students completing those qualifications have the relevant knowledge and skills to successfully be able to build a career in the family day care sector;
- 2) Ensuring information linking qualifications and employment options in family day care settings is accurate and nationally consistent, to enable informed decision-making on the part of consumers (students).
- 3) Incentivising uptake of the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care in regional and remote areas through fully subsidising the qualification, or adding it to the list of eligible qualifications in the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program.

¹³ See <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupation.aspx?code=4211>

¹⁴ SkillsIQ, Children's Education and Care, Industry Reference Committee, Industry Skills Forecast, refreshed April 2017.