



Early Learning Association Australia Submission 4 November 2016

Improving quality in early childhood education and care training: A discussion paper in response to the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) Strategic Review

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak body representing over 1300 service providers in Victoria and across Australia. Our membership includes independent preschools; early years management organisations; integrated and long day care services; government and independent schools; and out of school hours care services.

ELAA's vision is 'excellence in early learning for every child'.

The importance of regulating training providers and providing quality and grounded educational experiences for educators has been identified by the Productivity Commission and by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

ELAA welcomes the SkillsIQ consultation on improving the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) training. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute our views on the ASQA recommendations and to share our members' concerns about issues which may impact on the quality of graduates - and ultimately the quality of the ECEC workforce.

The ASQA report recognises that the *CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* and *CHC50113 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* are 'critical qualifications for early childhood education and care workers under the sector requirements of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care'.

Children learn best where there is a high level of quality of service and where the programs offered are rich in learning opportunities. Educators are critical to embedding education in everyday interactions and play-based activities, and to do this well, they need a solid grounding in child development as well as skills in pedagogical practice (O'Connell et al 2016). The quality of educators plays a critical role with children who attend high quality pre-school being protected long-term against some of the risks associated with disadvantages in early childhood (Hall et al 2009; Hall et al, 2013).

There are significant and long-term challenges in both attracting and retaining qualified staff to the ECEC sector. Improved government regulation of training providers is essential to ensuring a consistent supply of high quality early childhood educators. The demand for early childhood graduates has seen a proliferation of registered training providers (RTOs) offering sub-standard early learning courses, without adequate rigour in course content and in many cases, little or no practicum requirements. ECEC services report that some of the graduates of these courses seeking employment are inadequately prepared for their roles.

Many ECEC employers struggle to make comparisons between job applicants with the same qualification from different institutions. The courses offered to achieve the qualification can vary dramatically both in terms of type of delivery (distance learning, online delivery, face-to-face or mixed), and intensity (number of hours over a time period) and amount of workplace experience.

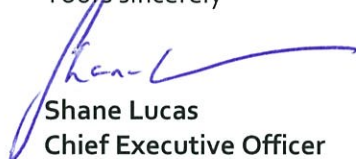
ELAA supports ASQA's recommendations for setting minimum benchmarks for ECEC training packages to ensure that students have adequate training, assessment and workplace experience.

One of the most obvious variations is the length of courses with the definitions of volume of learning for Certificate III and Diploma varying by as much as 100%, being typically between 1-2 years. Identifying a typical volume of learning as the number of hours in the description of qualifications would be one way of enabling a comparison about the amount of content provided.

It is essential that RTOs engage with ECEC services to provide the opportunity for structured workplace learning and assessment as outlined in recommendation 6. Minimum hours of workplace training provided as part of a course would give potential students guidance about the nature of the work and better prepare them to engage with children and families. It would also enable prospective students – and employers – to better compare courses – however these comparisons would only be realistic and effective if the RTO is audited and can demonstrate that the minimum hours are actually provided in an appropriate setting.

ELAA welcomes recommendation 5 and 7 which speak to ensuring unambiguous definitions of competency, including defining the evidence that demonstrates its acquisition and whether workplace delivery and assessment is required. Taken together, we believe that recommendations 5, 6 and 7 will make a valuable contribution to creating greater uniformity and quality across ECEC courses provided by RTOs.

Yours sincerely



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References

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