

Employment and mobility trajectories of overseas-born early childhood education and care (ECEC) workers in Darwin, NT

(Issue No. 201308)

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KEY FINDINGS

- Overseas-born ECEC workers represent nearly one-third of the entire ECEC workforce in the NT. The largest numbers were born in Asia.
- The majority of the interviewed overseas-born ECEC workers are already suitably qualified to work under the new minimum qualification standards coming into force on 1 January 2014. This includes those holding the required Certificate III in Children's Services, 11% holding other ECEC qualifications (Diploma in Children's Services) and 7% in possession of teaching qualifications (3.5% in Early Childhood).
- The 2011 Census data suggests that the overseas-born are better represented among childcare Centre Directors and childcare centre assistants in the NT than in Australia as a whole. They may however, have a lower share of the early childhood teaching positions than is recorded nationally.
- An overwhelming proportion (96%) of the interviewed overseas-born staff holds permanent employment contracts.
- The overseas-born ECEC personnel in the NT are passionate about working with babies and children. They work in a supportive work environment created by colleagues and Centre Directors.
- Higher wages, more time to upgrade formal qualifications, better financial recognition of higher level qualifications, and more flexible mode of formal training could improve their employment experience.
- The majority of the interviewees intended to live (85%) and work in the ECEC sector (81%) in the NT long-term. Family ties and the NT lifestyle and climate were the two principal reasons for migration to and staying in the NT.
- The overseas-born component of the ECEC NT workforce is likely to be stable rather than transitory, which may help address the retention problems noted by the *Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011-2021*.
- The attraction of new workers to the ECEC sector remains an issue. The appeal of a career in this industry can be improved by promoting permanent contracts and that fact that there is a better chance for the overseas-born of reaching a management level in the NT rather than elsewhere in Australia, offering scholarships to study for an ECEC qualification at CDU, work experience through the VET in Schools programs at NT senior schools (at Certificate II level), and career counsellors introducing graduates to careers in the ECEC sector.
- Future research may replicate this study across the NT to obtain a complete picture of the overseas-born in the ECEC sector, expand this study to models of childcare other than long day care facilities, and conduct a comparative study with other regional cities in Australia or overseas.

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This study was partially funded by the CDU Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts in 2012.

We thank all the Centre Directors for allowing us to invite their overseas-born staff to participate and the participants for sharing their stories.

In line with our ethics clearance, the Centres where the interviews were conducted, the Directors, and individual participants cannot be named.

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Introduction

This research brief discusses preliminary findings from a pioneering study of overseas-born early childhood educators and carers (ECEC) in the Northern Territory (NT). This pilot study has investigated the skill levels and level of employment of ECEC workers in the NT, their job satisfaction, professional development expectations and mobility trajectories. The former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) conducted a national Census of the ECEC workforce in 2010 and 2013 but the region or country of birth was not included in the questionnaire. Therefore, this project is the first of its kind in Australia.

Current national and NT policy developments make this study very timely. Greater professionalisation of the ECEC workforce and a growth in its size are part of the Australian Government agenda for reforms in this sector in the period 2012–2020, identified in the *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education*. The new *National Quality Framework* (NQF) was introduced in January 2012 and key requirements such as higher level qualifications will be phased in over time (DEEWR not dated). Specifically, from 1 January 2014, Certificate III in Children's Services will be the minimum standard for working in the ECEC sector, with some workers required to hold early childhood teaching degrees, depending on child to carer ratios and child ages.¹ As part of the new Early Years Quality Fund (EYQF), the Australian Government has announced that it would provide a \$3 per hour increase by July 2013 to ECEC workers who hold at least Certificate III (Woodley 2013).²

A double challenge faces the NT ECEC sector. The first is related to the gaining of formal qualifications to meet the new national qualifications standards. The *Northern Territory Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011–2021* (NTG 2011) recognises that while the NT Government needs to introduce changes as part of the national agenda, it continues to face a significant gap between qualified workforce supply and demand, with a high proportion of employees with no qualifications or qualifications below the level required by the ECEC reforms. The second challenge for the NT is related to high workforce mobility and the choice of profession. The 2011 Census revealed that the NT ECEC workforce has only 1,515 workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census, customised data). High turnover in this small workforce would likely have negative effects on the quality of service and potentially child development. The *NT Workforce Plan* recognises that improved attraction, recruitment and retention strategies are needed (NTG 2011). These strategies will become increasingly important as Darwin faces rapid population growth which will place more pressure on the provision of early childhood care (Silburn et al. 2011).

Project design and ethics

Aims and objectives This research brief is intended as a rapid form of dissemination of findings and will be followed by peer-reviewed publications. It aims to fill a knowledge gap about the overseas-born ECEC workers in order to provide evidence to assist the NT in developing strategies to successfully implement its own *Workforce Plan* as well as meet the new national standards. This information will also be of interest to other stakeholders such as the Human Services Training Advisory Council NT. The objectives to realise this aim are to:

1. Document the demographic, economic and qualifications characteristics of the overseas-born ECEC workforce in the NT;
2. Document their level of employment, job satisfaction and professional development expectations and;
3. Understand their mobility motivations and patterns.

¹ By early November 2013, the new Coalition Government had announced a review of NQF, specifically of the timeframe for mandating higher level qualifications and improving staff to child ratios. See Ley 2013.

² This Fund is also currently under review by the new Coalition Government. No new applications are accepted. See Department of Education 2013.

Methods, data and geographic coverage This project combines statistical and empirical data collection and analysis. It uses unpublished statistics on the population under review purchased from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Analysis of the Census data focuses on the 2011 results and the 2006 Census is referred to for comparative purposes. The time span of the DIAC data is 2001 to 2011. This aligns with the Census statistics which goes back five years respectively. Analysis of these statistics serves to address the first objective of this project. The key ABS variables include: age, gender, region of birth, proficiency in spoken English, occupation, labour force status, highest level of obtained qualification and year of arrival. The key DIAC variables on permanent additions³ include: age, region of birth, eligibility stream (skill, family, humanitarian), occupation and year of arrival. Analysis of the ABS and DIAC data is descriptive because small numbers do not warrant an advanced statistical analysis. Information obtained in twenty-seven personal interviews with staff from six long day childcare centres in Darwin and Palmerston (conducted in July and August 2012) permits addressing the second objective of this study. The interview questionnaire captured demographic characteristics of the participants, which matched the ABS statistical variables, their education and work experience, mobility motivations and mobility history within Australia, and their immigration status and the type of visa on which they first arrived in Australia. Descriptive statistical analysis is used here to report the interview findings.

Findings

Workforce size and region of birth The 2006 and 2011 Censuses reveal that the total ECEC workforce in the NT represented a stable 1% of the total ECEC workforce in Australia. At the 2006 Census there were 1,235 individuals employed in this sector in the NT (297 overseas-born). This figure has increased to 1,515 (419 overseas-born) by the 2011 Census. Between the two Censuses the proportion of the overseas-born in the ECEC workforce in the NT has increased from one-fourth to nearly one-third and has remained higher than their proportion in Australia as a whole (Table 1). The Asian-born represented higher proportionate shares at each Census in the NT than in Australia. Their proportionate growth between 2006 and 2011 has also been higher in the NT than nationally. In the interviews, 67% were born in Asia, 4% jointly in the UK and Ireland and 15% each in the Pacific Islands and ‘all other countries’.

Table 1. Region of birth, employed ECEC workers* in NT and Australia.

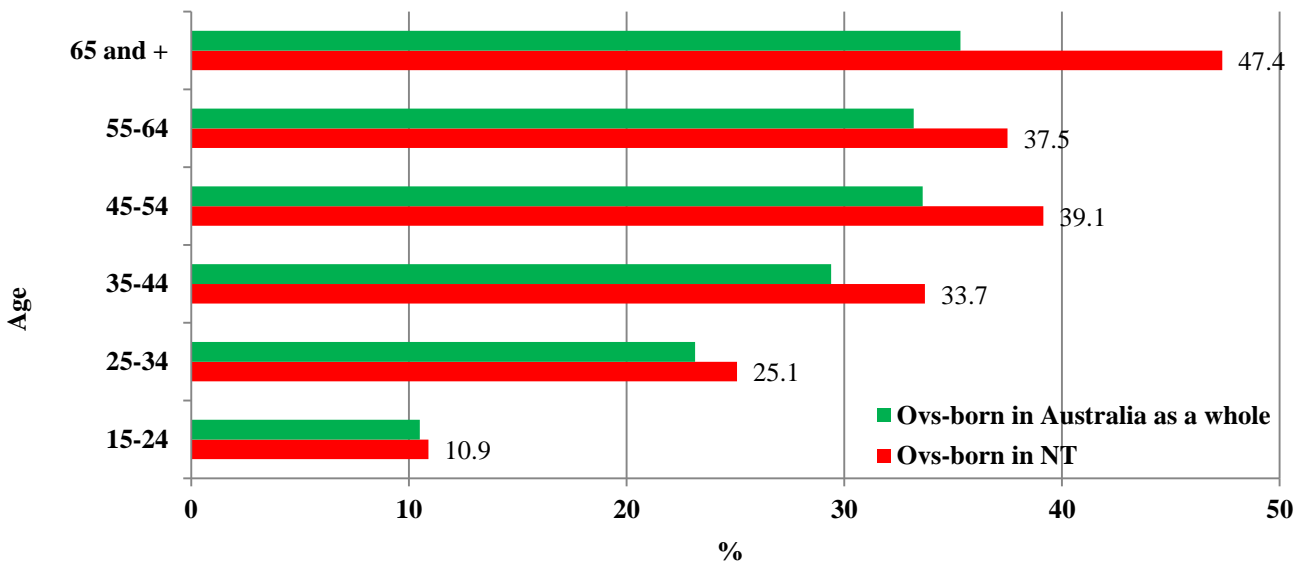
Region of birth	% 2006 Census		% 2011 Census	
	NT	Australia	NT	Australia
Aus-born (incl. External Territories)	73.8	77.9	71.1	74.0
NZ-born	2.3	2	1.9	2.2
Asia-born	10.5	6	15.7	9.6
UK & IRE-born	3.7	5.2	3.4	4.8
Born elsewhere in Europe	3.1	2.8	1.8	2.7
Born in all other countries	4.5	4.1	4.7	5.5
Ovs-born (ex. NZ)	21.7	18.1	25.6	22.6
Ovs-born (incl. NZ)	24	20.1	27.5	24.8
Not stated	2.2	2	1.4	1.2
Total	100	100	100	100

³ Permanent additions - sum of permanent settler arrivals from offshore and permanent visas granted onshore to people on temporary visas (DIAC 2010:181).

Note: *Childcare centre managers, early childhood teachers, childcare workers, family day care workers, nannies, child carers not further defined (nfd) and preschool aides. Sources: ABS 2006, 2011 Censuses, unpublished data.

Age structure and gender composition Figure 1 shows that at the 2011 Census the overseas-born in the NT and Australia were generally older and had a lower share of the younger age groups. A similar distribution was observed at the 2006 Census (not shown). The interviews confirmed this age structure: there was a low proportion of the youngest workers aged 15 to 24 (15%) and higher proportions of middle age and older workers aged 45 and over. The 2011 Census also showed that proportions of women employed in this sector in the NT and nationally ranged from 94% to 97%. In the interviews 100% participants were women.

Figure 1. Age group composition of overseas-born ECEC workers^(*),^(**), NT and Australia



Notes: *Overseas-born include NZ-born. Age groups in NT and Australia as a whole comprise each: (i) Australian-born, (ii) overseas-born and (iii) country of birth not stated. **Encompasses: Childcare centre managers, early childhood teachers, childcare workers, family day care workers, nannies, child carers nfd and preschool aides. Source: ABS 2011 Census, unpublished data.

Period of arrival and immigration stream: ABS, DIAC and interview data The 2011 Census revealed that 38.2% of the overseas-born ECEC workers had arrived in Australia between 1981 and 2000, nearly 15% between 2001 and 2006 and 24% between 2007 and 2010. Fewer more recent arrivals recorded by the 2011 Census (2.4% arrived in 2011 till the Census time) can partially be explained by the fact that individuals with qualifications and experience in this sector have currently restricted avenues for skilled migration to Australia: of all ECEC occupations only ‘childcare centre managers’ and ‘early childhood teachers’ are eligible. The arrival data align with the older age structure of the overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT.

The interview data confirmed the Census results. The majority of the interviewees arrived in Australia between 1981 and 2000 (48%). Arrivals 2007–2010 represented 19% of the sample and the 2011 arrivals had a 15% share. The interviews suggested that few overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT may have lived elsewhere in Australia as 81% reported moving to the NT directly from overseas.

The DIAC statistics of permanent additions of immigrants with ECEC-related occupations to the NT population revealed merely 24 such additions between 2001-02 and 2010-11. They were concentrated in the family stream (where qualifications do not determine eligibility for migration),

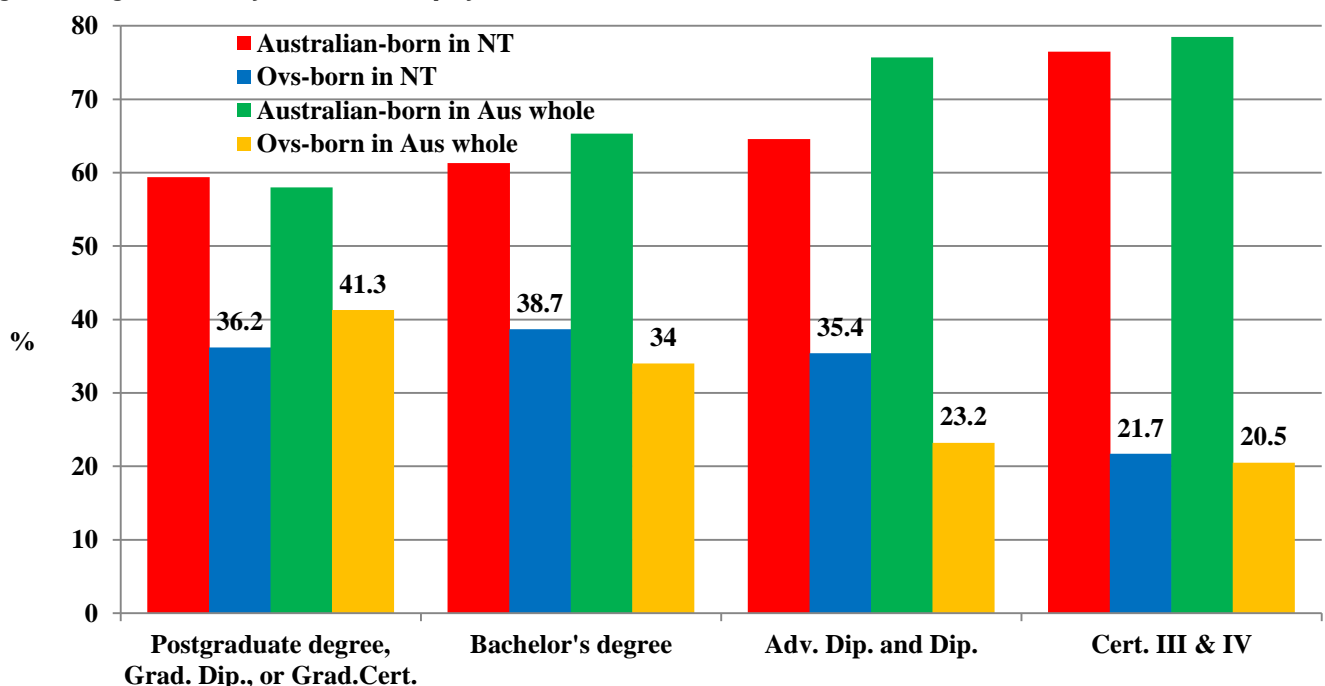
followed by the skilled stream. ‘Early childhood teacher’, ‘education aides’ and ‘childcare workers’ were the most common. Similarly, in this period, in Australia as a whole more permanent additions with ECEC-related qualifications were recorded in the family rather than the skilled stream (except two years). The concept of permanent additions differs from the concept of employed individuals used in the Census. Permanent additions record the pre-migration occupation as opposed to the Census, which captures the occupation in which one works in Australia.

The interviews revealed that regardless of immigration stream, migration served to reunite a family or keep a nucleus family unit together, except those of refugee backgrounds (11% of the sample), where the migration party was not always the immediate family. In line with the DIAC data, the majority of the respondents were family stream migrants (63%). Some arrived as spouses or fiancées of either Australian or overseas-born husbands and others were sponsored by family members. All those who arrived as skilled migrants (15%) were dependents on their husbands’ skilled visas. The majority of the remaining 11% of the sample were in the non-visaed categories.

English language ability The Census and interview data are self-assessments and indicate high English language ability. The 2011 Census revealed that 40% of the overseas-born ECEC workers spoke only English and of those who also spoke other language(s), 30% reported speaking English ‘very well’ and 26% ‘well’. Similar results were shown by the 2006 Census. In the interviews, 81% thought that they spoke English ‘very well’ and 19% ‘well’. There was less confidence in reading and writing: 67% reported doing so ‘very well’ and 33% ‘well’.

Highest level of education in any field of study The 2006 and 2011 (Figure 2) Census figures showed that (a) the overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT and Australia as a whole had lower levels of education than the Australian-born and (b) on comparing the NT with Australia as a whole, the overseas-born in the NT had higher proportionate shares of those holding Bachelor’s degrees, Advanced Diplomas & Diplomas, and Certificates III and IV than their counterparts nationally.

Figure 2. Highest level of education, employed Australian* and overseas-born** ECEC workers***, NT and Australia.



Notes: *Australian-born include External Territories. **Overseas-born include New Zealand-born. Total population includes (i)

Australian-born, (ii) overseas-born and (iii) persons who did not state their country of birth.

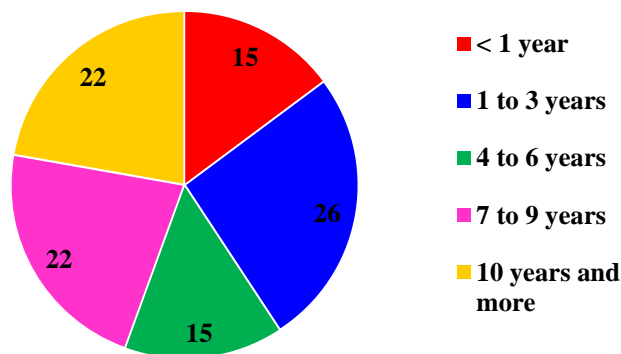
***Encompasses: Childcare centre managers, early childhood teachers, childcare workers, family day care workers, nannies, child carers nfd and preschool aides. Source: ABS 2011 Census, customised data.

Determining the highest level of education of the interview participants was complicated by the fact that some held qualifications from both overseas and Australia, typically CDU in Darwin. All interviewees stated that they had post-school qualifications, with 56% obtaining their highest qualification in Australia. While 15% had had their overseas qualifications formally recognised in Australia, the majority had not. This was likely because (a) as family stream migrants they did not need to take this step in order to immigrate and (b) by the time of the interviews they had typically completed or were studying towards an ECEC-related qualification. Their formal overseas qualifications were sometimes at a higher level (for example a Bachelor's degree or a Diploma) than the Australian qualifications (typically a Certificate III in Children's Services). They were awarded in areas as diverse as biology, pharmacy, music, business, accounting, tourism, information technology and education.

Given that a Certificate III in Children's Services is the minimum qualification to be held by staff working in ECEC services from 1 January 2014 (though this policy could be changed by the Coalition Government), it is important to note that 52% of the staff interviewed had already met this requirement. A further 11% held other ECEC qualifications (Diploma in Children's Services), 7% had teaching qualifications (3.5% in Early Childhood) and 30% had non-ECEC qualifications. Given the current child/staff profiles in the ECEC centres involved, the majority of those interviewed were already suitably qualified to work. Two-thirds (70%) were interested in upgrading their qualifications or already studying towards a higher level qualification, the majority in an ECEC-related field of study. Two-thirds of them (75%) would choose to study with CDU with the remainder choosing one of two private providers. The 19% not interested in further formal studies were either approaching retirement and/or had been employed in the sector for many years, already held Diploma level qualifications and were content to remain in their current roles.

Length of work experience in the ECEC sector and previous work experience The interviewed workers were highly experienced with 44% reporting more than seven years' experience in the sector in Australia (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of length of work experience in ECEC sector. Overseas-born ECEC workers, NT.



Source: Interviews July-August 2012.

More than three-quarters (78%) of interviewees had no formal ECEC work experience from overseas, which includes those who had worked in the human services sector as nurses or teachers. Another 7% with no formal work experience in the ECEC sector said that they were looking after

children in the family. Previous formal areas of employment were hospitality, small business ownership, customer support and administrative duties in large companies, government administration and human services. Only 15% reported formal work experience in the ECEC sector overseas. These results well illustrate the DIAC statistics cited earlier, which showed very low numbers of permanent additions with ECEC-related qualifications to the NT population.

Level of employment and type of contract The majority (59%) of the interviewed overseas-born ECEC workers worked as assistants/aides. Group leaders and teachers in charge accounted for 37% and 4% were Centre Directors. The 2011 Census permits comparing shares of employed Australian and overseas-born workers in selected ECEC occupations. While the results in the NT should be interpreted with caution (small numbers were randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data), it is interesting to note that the NT had possibly a higher representation of the overseas-born childcare Centre Directors than Australia as a whole (31% vs. 20%). Similarly, the overseas-born might have been slightly better represented as childcare workers in the NT than nationally (30% vs. 25%). However, they might have had a lower share of the early childhood teaching positions than in Australia as a whole (11% vs. 20%). An overwhelming 96% held permanent employment contracts.

Integration at work and perceptions of workplace More than one answer could be given to questions relating to self-perceived integration at work and perceptions of the workplace, as a result, the responses do not add up to 100%. The most common comments were the love for working with children, work being fun, bringing satisfaction and coming to work was enjoyable because of its nature (85% of responses). Then next most often made observation regarded the healthy and welcoming work environment (63%). Staff were also helping one another with their studies. Further illustrations of a supportive work environment (22%) included a supportive, likeable manager who was encouraging staff to study and helping set up practice for assignments. Some mature age respondents spoke about enjoying their role as educators, being able to teach children new things and having the honour to influence and watch their development (15%). This would suggest that in their mind, their profession was a respectable one. Comments were also made about the workplace providing opportunities for learning new skills and a confidence boost received by staff when their centre passed the accreditation test, which involved learning and implementing new professional practices (7%). Ethnic and cultural diversity of staff and children was perceived as another highlight (11%). Respondents valued this diversity for providing them with an opportunity for sharing cultures with one another, with children and learning about different communities.

Suggestions for improving the employment experience These fell into financial and education-related suggestions. As above, interviewees were invited to give more than one response, so they do not add up to 100%. First, 85% cited higher wages and 22% thought that higher qualifications should be better financially recognised. Second, more time to upgrade formal qualifications was desired by 48% and 22% wished for a more flexible mode of formal training. Importantly, 7% of respondents representing Asian and African countries noted that their prior learning should be better recognised by the ECEC sector in Australia. Finally, 41% wished for a less stressful work environment. One person commented that it felt like they needed 'more hands', which indicates that the children to staff ratio would benefit from being lowered.

Mobility motivations Table 2 reveals that family ties and the NT lifestyle and climate were the two principal reasons for migration to and staying in the NT. Participants were invited to give multiple responses so they do not add up to 100%.

Table 2. Top five mobility motivations, immigrant-born ECEC workers, NT

Motivations	Rank	
	Come	Stay
Family ties	1	2
NT lifestyle & climate	2	1
Other (friendly, multicultural community, small city)	3	1/2
Education for children	4	4
Job offer (not visa-related)	5	na
To meet visa conditions	5	na
Satisfied with pay conditions	na	5
Overall work satisfaction	na	2
Good personal relationships with other staff	na	3
Supportive management	na	3

Source: Interviews July-August 2012.

First, 85% said that they had migrated to the NT to join their immediate or extended families already settled there. The NT lifestyle and climate reminiscent of that in countries of Southeast Asia was the second most important reason (19%). 'Other' reasons included the multicultural and friendly Darwin community and the convenience of small city living where all facilities were close. Short distance to the country of origin was also important (11%). These 'other' motivations support the notion of an attractive lifestyle. Other ranked motivations for coming were mentioned by between 4% and 7% of respondents (not shown).

Reasons for staying were similar to the above with lifestyle (74%) and sense of community (74%) being the equal top. The Filipino-born interviewees in particular spoke of their engagement with the local Filipino community. The small size of Darwin, which perhaps contributed to the sense of community, ranked as the second most important reason for staying (70%). Those who enjoyed the small city living also spoke of Darwin's multicultural character and friendly people. Family ties and stimulating work ranked *ex aequo* as second most important reasons for staying (70% each). Good relations at work ranked third gaining 56% each. Education for children was far more important as a reason for staying (44%) than as a reason for coming (7%). Considering the universally low wages in the ECEC sector in Australia, it is interesting to note that pay conditions were acceptable to 29% and these respondents were aware of different rates paid by different centres.

The majority of the interviewees intended to live in the NT permanently or longer-term (85%). Reasons were primarily family-related. The remaining 15% intended to stay for a couple of years. Interviewees were also asked if they had plans or wanted to move in the next 12 months. Only 11% agreed and reasons included meeting visa/contract conditions and following family if they were moving. As 81% of the interviewees anticipated working in the ECEC sector in the NT in the next five to ten years, it can be surmised that nearly all of those who planned to stay would also remain employed in the industry for this period of time. The majority of the remaining 19% who were not planning to remain in the ECEC sector in the NT intended to work in another sector in the Territory.

Current resident status The majority of the interviewees (74%) were already Australian citizens. The remaining 15% were permanent residents and 11% were temporary residents. All interviewees who arrived as temporary residents (a) intended to apply, or (b) had already received, or (c) had applications for permanent residency in Australia in progress. This illustrates their long-term civic commitment to Australia and corroborates the earlier finding that the majority intended to reside and work in the NT long-term.

Discussion and recommendations

It has been revealed that more than 80% of the interviewed overseas-born ECEC workers were committed to staying and working in the ECEC sector in the Territory long-term. On the one hand, this should be welcome news to the NT policy makers, regulators and the community because high stability of nearly one-third of the ECEC workforce may help resolve some of the retention problems noted by the *Northern Territory Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011-2021* (NTG 2011). On the other hand, this problematizes the previous evidence-supported and accepted views in Australia that skilled labour force in peripheral and remote areas obtained through migration is highly mobile (NTT 2012; Garnett *et al.* 2008; ABS 2003).

How can this stability be explained? First, the integrity of social links. The majority of the respondents in this study have come to the NT to maintain their family connections rather than to use their ECEC-related overseas qualifications and experience. Family ties were equally important to family stream and skilled stream migrants (that is, secondary skilled visa holders). The majority of the respondents have become ECEC workers after arrival. This is likely because formalised childcare arrangements are either non-existent in many countries, or not as well developed as in Australia, and looking after children is part of the assumed duties of females in the family. Second, geography and environment. It is likely that the proximity to the Southeast Asian region of origin of many participants and similarities to its lifestyle and climate kept the respondents in Darwin. Enjoying Darwin's cultural diversity and openness of people, and contributing to it as in the case of the Filipino-born, suggests that the respondents had a sense of belonging to the community. Another contributing factor may be that a high proportion of the interviewees moved to the NT directly from overseas and have not had an experience of living elsewhere in Australia. Third, wages in the ECEC sector are universally low, giving no incentive to relocate interstate to advance one's career. Fourth, the majority of the overseas-born ECEC workers held permanent positions, which would give them a sense of stability thus also supporting their retention. It could be further argued that a supportive work environment, work satisfaction and having helping and approachable Centre Directors played an important part in retention. Greater retention of overseas-born ECEC workers would contribute to greater retention overall as these workers develop skills that enable them to mentor younger or less experienced workers contributing to a greater level of work satisfaction for all workers. These point to the need for ongoing professional development in the area of mentoring and possibly the opportunity for some of these workers to undertake further qualifications such as the Advanced Diploma of Community Sector Management to give them the skills to take on positions as Directors in the industry in the NT.

In light of the gap between qualified workforce demand and supply and insufficient levels of formal qualifications or lack of them altogether in the ECEC staff in the NT (NTG 2011), findings from this study can at least partially reassure policy makers, regulators and parents. It has been shown that more than half of the overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT already hold a Certificate III in Children's Services and 70% are either interested in furthering their qualifications or already studying, usually towards ECEC-related qualification. This suggests that this population is generally on track to meet the higher level qualifications requirements, if they still come into force on 1 January 2014. Although overseas-born childcare workers are better represented in the NT ECEC workforce than nationally, it is this group that forms the core of the ECEC workforce so those who do not yet hold a Certificate III should be encouraged to do so. By contrast, overseas-born early childhood teachers are likely underrepresented in the NT, which suggests that efforts should simultaneously be made to encourage and assist interested and able staff to attain these qualifications to help the NT meet the new national industry qualifications standards. The Centre Directors who are already supporting staff in upgrading their qualifications will need to continue to

do so. Considering the lower self-assessment of reading and writing than speaking in English, it is reasonable to expect that some of these learners will need additional assistance or time to complete their study assignments. Given that the majority of overseas-born ECEC workers had not had their overseas qualifications formally recognised in Australia, when these workers enrol in an early childhood qualification, greater emphasis should be placed on identifying their existing skills and knowledge through a recognition process. To some degree, this could reduce the number of units required for completion of a qualification therefore allowing more time to focus on developing their reading and writing skills to industry standard.

A range of measures to further develop the ECEC workforce were recommended by the former Federal Government's *Early Years Workforce Strategy: The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for Australia 2012–2016* (Education Services Australia 2012). They could be accessed by overseas-born ECEC workers and their employers to assist the implementation of the *NT Workforce Plan*, achieve the required education standards and thus professionalize and retain the NT ECEC workforce. Those that could probably benefit the largest number of the overseas-born include:

- Removal of TAFE/VET fees to enable aspiring and existing educators in the industry to obtain a Diploma and Advanced Diploma in early childhood.
- The HECS-HELP benefits for early childhood education teachers, which reduce the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debts of early childhood education teachers who work in areas of high need. These are regional areas inclusive of their cities such as Darwin.
- There is also the Early Years Quality Fund to attract and retain qualified professionals provided directly to long day care early childhood services by supplementing wages for holders of Certificate III and above. This Fund is under review by the current Coalition Government. Its shape is yet to be determined (Department of Education 2013).

The attraction of new workers to the ECEC sector remains an issue (NTG 2011). This study suggests that the appeal of a career in this industry can be improved. First, permanent contracts could be promoted to both overseas and Australian-born potential staff as an attractive aspect of employment. Second, a better chance for the former of reaching a management level in the NT rather than elsewhere in Australia could be used as a motivator. Third, attracting young Australian and overseas-born Territorians could include additional scholarships to study for an ECEC qualification at CDU (the preferred provider of the majority of the respondents), work experience through the VET in Schools programs at NT senior schools (at Certificate II level), and career counsellors introducing graduates to careers in the ECEC sector.

Future research

Promising new research directions include:

- (a) replicating this study across the NT to obtain a complete picture of the overseas-born ECEC workers and establish their mobility intentions;
- (b) expanding this research to other models of childcare (for example not-for-profit organisations, community-based incorporated entities) across the NT and;
- (c) conducting a comparative study of the overseas-born ECEC workforce in Darwin with their counterparts in other regional Australian cities and/or a similar regional city overseas.

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