A Northern Perspective on the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce

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Presentation outline

- Setting the scene
- Aims and objectives
- Approach
- Results 2011 Census
  - ECEC workforce size and region of birth in Australia and the NT
  - Age group characteristics of employed immigrant-born ECEC workers
  - Highest level of education of Australian and immigrant-born ECEC workers
- Results 2012 interviews
  - Qualifications profile and further intentions to study
  - Length of work experience in the ECEC sector
  - Level of employment and type of contract
  - Integration at work and perceptions of workplace
  - Mobility motivations of employed immigrant-born ECEC workers
  - Residency and work intentions
- Discussion and recommendations
Setting the scene (1)

- Skills shortages and high population mobility in peripheral areas
  - interstate migration
  - staff turnover and associated costs
  - fewer lifestyle options
  - preference for big cities, distance from everywhere

- High workforce turnover in the ECEC sector
  - issues for child developmental outcomes and service delivery
  - low pay and poor employment conditions
Setting the scene (2)

Current challenges for the Northern Territory

- National Quality Framework
  - Mandated minimum qualification standards and new child: carer ratios

- NT Early Childhood Workforce Plan (2011-2021)
  Improved attraction, recruitment and retention strategies
Aims:
(1) Understand how prepared the immigrant-born ECEC workers in the NT are to satisfy the new minimum standards and their mobility motivations in order to estimate retention challenges
(2) Expand the literature on the ECEC workforce

Objectives:
(1) Document the demographic and economic characteristics of the immigrant-born ECEC workforce in the NT
(2) Document their level of employment and job satisfaction
(3) Understand their mobility motivations
Mixed methods approach

- Analysis of unpublished 2011 Census statistics
- Interviews with a sample (n = 27) of immigrant-born ECEC workers in Darwin and Palmerston (long day care)
Results from 2011 Census
ECEC workforce size in NT and Australia

ECEC workforce in NT represents 1% of the national workforce (134,833 people)

1,515 people employed in ECEC NT:
• 1,077 Australian-born
• 419 immigrant-born
• 19 country of birth not stated.

## Region of birth, employed ECEC workers* in NT and Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of birth</th>
<th>% 2006 Census</th>
<th>% 2011 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus-born (incl. External Territories)</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ-born</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-born</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK &amp; IRE-born</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born elsewhere in Europe</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in all other countries</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant-born (ex. NZ)</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant-born (incl. NZ)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Childcare centre managers, early childhood teachers, childcare workers, family day care workers, nannies, child carers not further defined (nfd) and preschool aides.

Age group characteristics of employed immigrant-born ECEC workers

- Like their Australian-born counterparts, the immigrant-born ECEC workers in NT are older. They have high proportions of workers in the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups.

  Source: ABS 2011 Census, customised data.

- Strategies to use them as mentors to younger workers are worthwhile considering. They could help mitigate the loss of skills and knowledge when these cohorts retire.
Highest level of education, employed Australian and immigrant-born ECEC workers

Results from interviews
Key interview topics

- **Socio-economic characteristics** (age, country of birth, English language ability)

- **Education and work** (foreign and Australian post-school qualifications, intentions to study, period of experience in ECEC sector, current role, professional intentions, mobility motivations)
Qualifications profile and further study intentions (1)

Overview

• High levels of self-reported English language ability for listening and speaking, lower for reading and writing – noticeable impact on decision to take on higher levels of study and preferred delivery format

• 100% had post-school qualifications

• Overseas qualifications sometimes at a higher level (Diploma/Bachelor) than Australian qualification (typically a Certificate III in Children’s Services from CDU in Darwin)
Qualifications and further study intentions (2)

- 63% of interviewees had a Certificate III in Children’s Services or Diploma in Children’s Services (required for working in the industry)
- 7% had teaching qualifications (3.5% in ECEC)
- 30% had non-ECEC qualifications
- 70% interested in upgrading their qualifications or were already studying, usually for an ECEC-related qualification
- 2/3 would choose to study with CDU
- 19% not interested in further study were approaching retirement, were long-term sector employees, or held Diploma qualifications and were happy in their current role
Percentage distribution of length of work experience immigrant-born ECEC workers, NT

44% had 7 or more years of experience in ECEC industry in Australia/NT
Level of employment, type of contract

- Interviews
  - 59% - assistants/aides
  - 37% - group leaders, teachers
  - 4% - centre directors
  - **96% on permanent contracts**

- **Census 2011 on immigrant-born ECEC workers in NT:**
  - Higher % of centre directors than nationally
  - Higher % of assistants/aides than nationally
  - Lower % teachers than nationally
Integration at work, perceptions of workplace

- 85% - love working with children, work bringing professional satisfaction
- 63% - good work environment, teamwork, staff help each other with studies
- 22% - supportive manager who encourages & helps with studies
- 11% - ethnic and cultural diversity
- 7% - place of learning new skills
## Top five mobility motivations, immigrant-born ECEC workers, NT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Come</th>
<th>Stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family ties</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT lifestyle &amp; climate</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (friendly, multicultural community, small city, close to CoB)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for children</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job offer (not visa-related)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet visa conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with pay conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td>na</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall work satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>na</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good personal relationships with other staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>na</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive management</td>
<td></td>
<td>na</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason to leave or move</td>
<td></td>
<td>na</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Residency and work intentions

- 85% - intend to live in NT permanently or long-term
- 81% - anticipate working in the ECEC sector for 5 to 10 years
- Nearly all stayers appear committed to the ECEC sector
- No respondents wanted to move interstate because they perceived Darwin to be disadvantaged by its peripheral location in Australia, fewer lifestyle options than in larger cities (common reason for leaving cited by nursing professionals, dentists in NT)
Discussion and recommendations (1)

Why immigrant-born ECEC workers do not behave like other workforces in NT and will not leave:

• Came for family not work-related reasons
• For many Darwin = convenient location to visit CoB in Asia
• Familiar tropical climate and lifestyle
• 81% have not lived elsewhere in Australia
• Enjoy multicultural character of Darwin, feel part of community
• Sector wages universally low – no advantage interstate
• Intrinsic professional motivations despite low wages
Further professionalisation, retention & attraction:

- Centre Directors to continue to encourage and help staff who study.
- Students from one centre to study with the same provider – can benefit from mutual support at work.
- Access measures available from the Australian Government.
- Promote ECEC sector at schools to increase the proportion of younger workers.
- Promote permanent contracts, better chances of becoming a Centre Director in NT.
Future research

- Outcomes from the pilot endorsed by the NT ECEC Key Stakeholder Advisory Group and further work supported.

- Initial investigations made to find partners and funds for collaborative work that could apply a similar methodology over further sites in Northern Australia (WA and QLD).

- We are interested to find partners who are prepared to invest in this work.
Thank you

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Figure 1. Age group composition of immigrant-born ECEC workers - NT and whole of Australia

Self-reported high English language ability
Should not hinder ability to communicate at work and/or undertake study

40% of immigrant-born ECEC workers reported speaking only English. When NZ-born were excluded, % of English only speakers decreased to 33.4%.

56% of speakers of other languages reported speaking English very well and/or well.

Source: 2011 Census, customised data.