
AEU Early Childhood Workload Survey Research Report

Key Findings &
Analysis

Shayne Quinn



AEU WORKLOAD SURVEY 2011

Research Report

KEY FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The issue of early childhood workforce supply is a critical one to be addressed in order that the State of Victoria can respond to the early childhood reform agenda detailed in the Early Childhood Education National Partnership Agreement.

This is recognised by a range of stakeholders – employers and their representative bodies; universities and TAFE institutions; staff and the unions that represent them; and of course governments at both the State and Commonwealth levels.

In the context of Universal Access scheduled for 2013, and the national regulatory reforms of 2014 requiring an early childhood teacher in services with more than 25 children, there is a particular need to address the attraction and retention of early childhood teachers. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in its submission to the Productivity Commission Education and Training Workforce Study (Early Childhood Development Workforce)¹ stated that Victoria would require an additional 600-800 early childhood teachers by 2013 to deliver universal access. This picture is compounded by the rapid birth rate in Victoria.

Whilst endeavours are being made by governments at both a State and Commonwealth level to attract school leavers, under-graduates and graduates to the sector with scholarships, incentives, mentoring programs and campaigns selling the positives of employment in the sector, the findings of the AEU Workload Survey paint a clear picture that these strategies alone are not and will not address the workforce challenges identified.

The findings of the AEU Workload Survey present a clear picture that in tandem with the longer term strategies of advertising, up-grading qualifications and supporting graduates on entry to the sector, something must be done urgently to address the workload of staff.

This report does not endeavour to address all aspects of the survey but rather focuses on the key findings which have immediate and ongoing impact on the capacity of the Victorian ECEC sector, in partnership with governments, to respond to the early childhood reform agenda detailed in the Early Childhood Education National Partnership Agreement.

¹ DEECD Submission to Productivity Commission ECD Workforce Study 2011 page 11

Methodology

The AEU Victorian Branch undertook this survey in order to collect information about the current views of early childhood teachers and assistants on their workload; the potential impacts of those views on the health and wellbeing of staff and workforce supply.

The survey addresses the areas of employed hours, additional/overtime and the status of that time, duties undertaken, ICT impact on work, changes to workload and overtime worked, impact of workload on intentions to leave the sector, how staff feel in relation to the change agenda in the ECEC sector, and aspects of that change impacting upon how they feel.

The Survey was drafted by the elected officers in the Early Childhood Sector in consultation with Justin Bowd AEU Research Officer. It was then piloted with members of the AEU Early Childhood Sector Council. Comments and responses from the Sector Councillors provided the basis for the refinement and finalisation of the questionnaire.

Notice of the survey was sent to all AEU early childhood sector members via email (where the address was available) and by post to the remaining members. Notification of the survey was also sent by post to all early childhood centres (preschools and long day care centres employing early childhood teachers) where there were no AEU members employed. The survey was available on the AEU website. Survey Monkey was utilised.

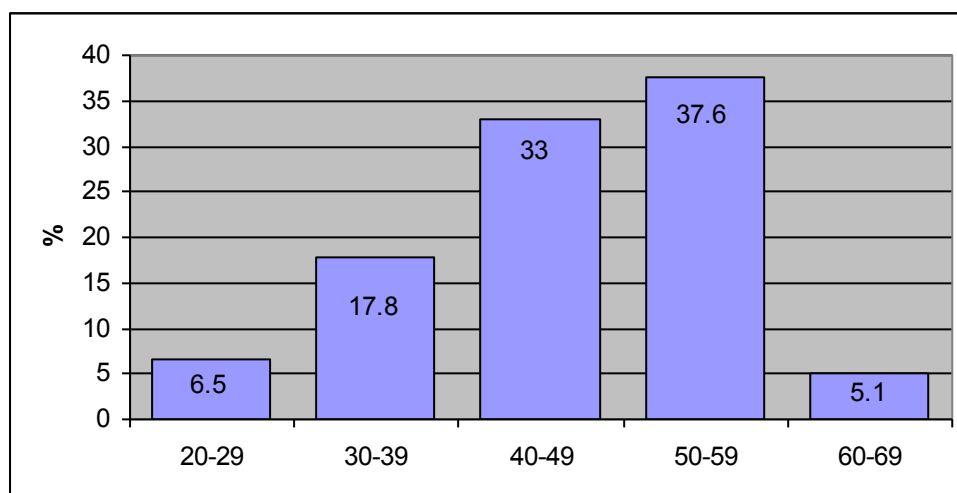
The survey opened on Tuesday June 14 and closed on Friday 8 July 2011.

Response Rate

A total of 421 responses were received. Whilst the survey didn't require the respondents to identify themselves according to their classification of teacher or assistant, examination of the response rate to the question relating to on-call provisions (an entitlement relevant to assistants) would suggest that 28 of the 421 were assistants.

Key Findings & Analysis

1. Age of respondents



(Diagram 1)

The age profile of respondents is in the view of the AEU reflective of the age profile of staff, particularly teachers, engaged in the delivery of preschool programs.

According to the DEECD Submission to the Productivity Commission ECD Workforce Study² “in 2009, the average age of teachers delivering a funded kindergarten program was 42 with about 28 per cent of teachers in metropolitan regions aged 50 or over and about 35 per cent of teachers in rural regions aged 50 and over.”

The majority of teachers currently within the sector are within 5-10 years of retirement age and the number of new entrants to the profession and sector are insufficient to replace those approaching retirement age.

In its submission to the Productivity Commission ECD Workforce Study³ DEECD stated that “early childhood teaching degrees are offered at seven Victorian universities, with a further university currently completing the Early Childhood Australia (Victoria) approval process for a new early childhood course.” It also indicated that “Seven Victorian universities currently offer teacher preparation courses that lead to a dual qualification that will enable graduates to teach in either early childhood or primary school settings” and that stakeholder consultation informed them that “the majority of students in these courses intend to enter primary teaching rather than early childhood careers.”

The low number of respondents to the AEU Workload Survey in the 20-29 age group may also be reflective of the low number of early childhood teacher graduates from universities entering the early childhood sector. Anecdotal information obtained by AEU representatives speaking to groups of undergraduates at the invitation of the Universities confirms that many students enrolled in courses leading to dual qualifications (early childhood /primary) indicate that it is their intent to teach in the primary sector. This is also the case in the ‘pathway courses’ where it appears that early childhood teaching is the pathway for many from child care to primary teaching.

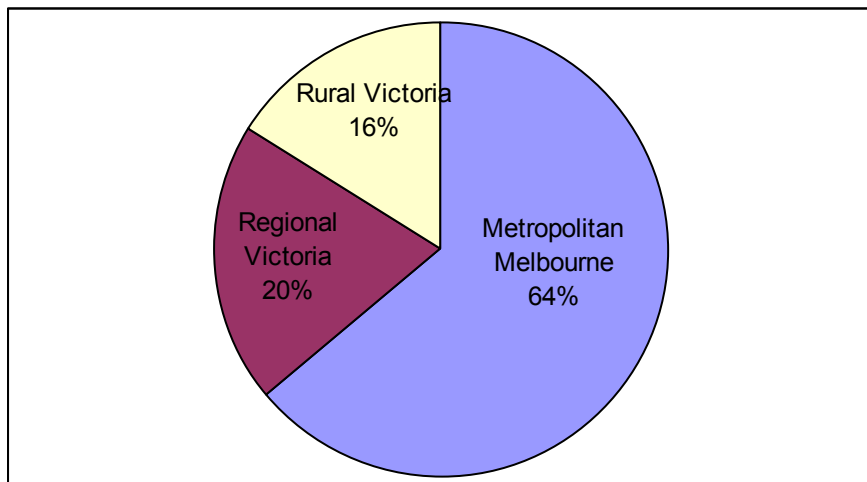
² DEECD Submission to Productivity Commission ECD Workforce Study 2011 page 5

³ DEECD Submission to Productivity Commission ECD Workforce Study 2011 page 13

We acknowledge that the research to be undertaken by DEECD to explore the motivations, critical decision points and influences on career choices for these students as referred to in the DEECD submission will be valuable. However engagement with undergraduate and beginning teachers confirms that workload is one of the influences impacting on their choice of sector to pursue their career.

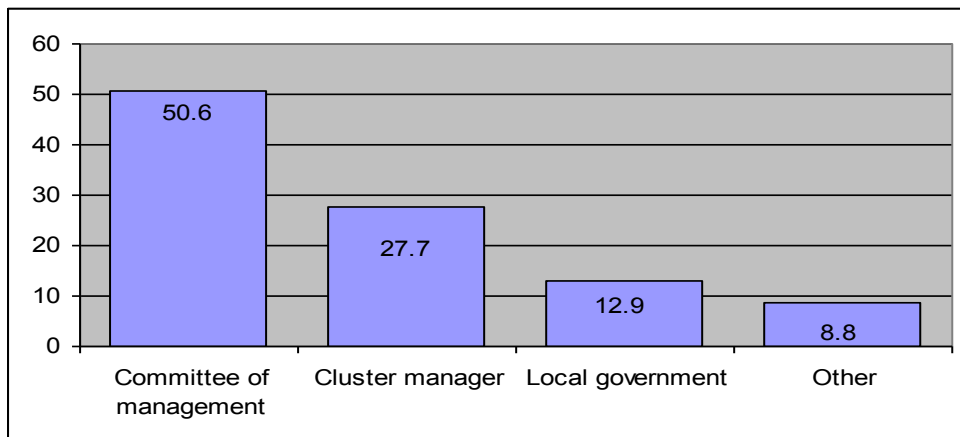
2. Workplace Information

Where is your workplace located?



(Diagram 2)

How is it operated?



(Diagram 3)

Responses were received from teachers and assistants across the State working in services operated by the breadth of service providers.

The AEU survey asked respondents to classify the operation of their service according to Committee of Management, Cluster Manager, Local Government or Other.

DEECD data informs us that 50 not for profit community based organisations were approved to provide cluster management in 2010 in addition to 25 local government authorities. Jointly they were responsible for 605 kindergarten services.⁴

⁴ Summary of Kindergarten Service Provision Sept 2011 DEECD

This represents 45.83% of the 1320 eligible services within the community managed sector.

Combining the responses from respondents to the AEU survey that identified their service as operated by Cluster manager (27.7%) with those indicating Local Government (12.9%) provides 40.6 per cent.

The balance of the 1320 community managed services identified by DEECD⁵ (715 services) represents 54.17 per cent. 50.6 per cent of respondents to the AEU survey indicated they were operated by Committees of Management.

Whilst proportionally there were marginally more responses from respondents employed in services operated by Committees of Management, the response rate from these groupings is not dissimilar to their pattern of service provision across the state.

3. Overtime or additional hours

(a) Status of overtime or additional hours

Indicate whether overtime or additional hours are

	All %	COM %	Cluster %	Local Gov %	Other %
Paid	6.8	6.3	7.8	2	8.1
Unpaid	70	67.1	72.2	80.4	64.9
Mix	20.1	24.1	17.4	15.7	16.2
Not applicable	3.1	2.5	2.6	2	10.8

(Table 1)

The majority of overtime or additional hours worked are unpaid (70% of all respondents). However, perhaps surprisingly given a few local government Enterprise Bargaining Agreements provide limited payment for out of hours work, 80.4% of respondents employed in local government indicated this was the case.

(b) Work performed in overtime or additional hours

If you undertake any overtime or additional hours beyond your paid hours (excluding on call hours for assistants), please indicate which of the following tasks or duties are undertaken during this time

	%
Portfolio development/maintenance, child individual records	82.8
Planning and evaluation of the program	81.5
Committee meetings, council meetings and/or AGM	78.2
PD, training or in-service associated with own PD plan	77.2
Preparing newsletters, info sheets	74.8
Preparation of the learning environment	73.5
Preparation of materials and equipment	72.5
Transition statements/transition network meetings	70.2
Professional Reading and Research	66.5
Staff meetings	61.8

⁵ Summary of Kindergarten Service Provision Sept 2011 DEECD

Written reports/meetings with specialists	57.5
Region teacher/staff network meetings	57.2
PD/info sessions re EC reform agenda	56.2
Study training required by new regulations	55.8
Dealing with service mail, emails or texts	54
Ordering/Purchasing supplies	53.2
Verbal reports to parents	47.8
Parent information/education sessions/activities	45.5
Self-assessment of service	44.8
Centre admin	43
Maintenance of facilities	39.8
Service fund-raising activities	36
Liaising with community	31.8
Mentoring colleagues	30.8
Supervision/mentoring of students	28.7
Travel	28.2
Planning meetings associated with universal access	27.3
OHS processes	26.8
Preparing submissions	26.2
Cleaning	22.8
Employer directed PD	20.8
Cluster management meetings	18.8
Performance reviews	15.5
Home/Long Day care service visits	5.2

(Table 2)

(c) Drivers for overtime or additional hours

Expressed as a percentage, what proportion of your unpaid overtime/additional hours is

	%
Required by your employer	28.5
Expected by your employer	37.6
Required to meet DEECD/legislative requirements	51.7
Other	38.4

(Table 3)

It is of note that almost 52 per cent of the unpaid overtime/additional hours are required to meet DEECD/legislative requirements.

Whilst some tasks or duties identified at Table 2 above, such as 'PD/info sessions re EC reform agenda'; 'Study training required by new regulations'; and 'Planning meetings associated with universal access' are obviously associated with the early childhood reform agenda, other tasks and duties are also impacted by it.

Although the bulk of the function referred to in the list at Table 2 are long standing functions of teaching many of them are now required to be viewed and undertaken through the new lens of frameworks and legislation and the consultation and conversations with other stakeholders necessary to development, change management and implementation.

These would include tasks and duties such as, but not limited to, planning, and associated evaluation, documentation, statements and reports, staff meetings, committee meetings, submission, liaising with communities etc. This impacts upon the time taken and thus the additional unpaid hours worked.

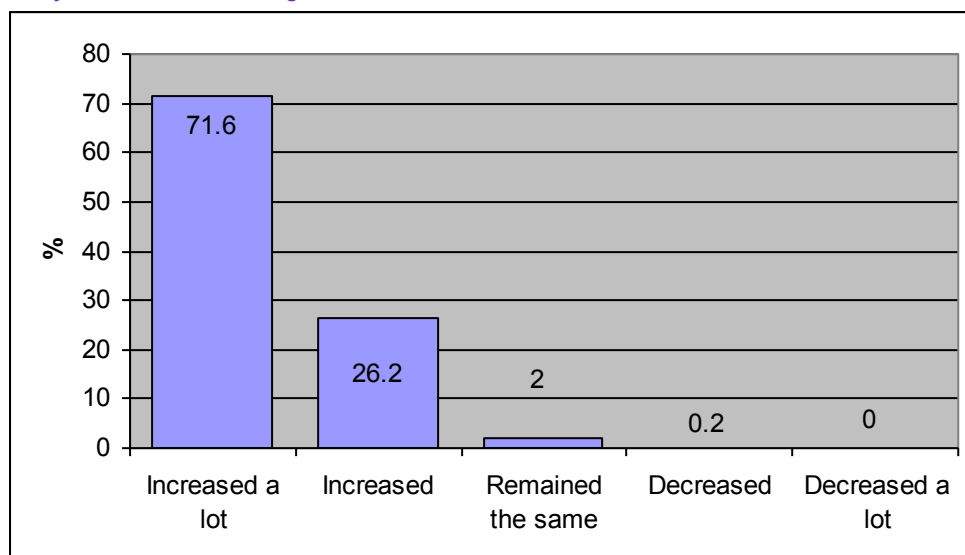
(d) Changes in workload and overtime

Questions in relation to the changes to workload and overtime were framed with reference to 2009.

2009 was selected as the reference point for these questions as it was a point in time when the rollout of significant changes commenced in the early childhood sector, including but not limited to: introduction of transition statements, introduction of the VEYLDF, introduction of the national framework and the change in the ratios of teaching to non-teaching time for teachers.

Workload

Has your workload changed since 2009?



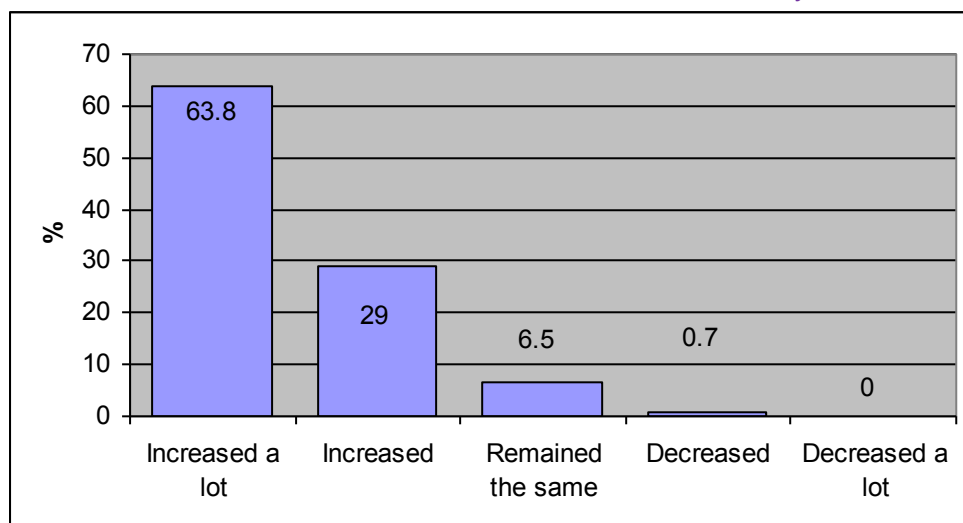
(Diagram 4)

An alarming 97.8 per cent of respondents said their workload had increased since 2009, with 71.6 per cent saying it had increased a lot.

The results depicted in Diagram 5 below indicate that much of the increased workload is being undertaken in unpaid overtime.

Overtime

Since 2009, has the amount of overtime/additional hours worked in your centre



(Diagram 5)

An overwhelming 92.8 per cent of respondent identified significant change to the additional hours they contribute to the conduct of work.

Almost 64 per cent of respondents indicated that their overtime/additional hours worked had increased a lot since 2009. A further 29 per cent indicated it had increased.

No part of the state or centre type has been immune to the significant changes to workload. The impact by location and centre type is detailed at Table 4 below.

Has your workload changed since 2009? (by location and centre type)

	All	Location			Type		
		Metro	Regional	Rural	COM	Cluster	Local Gov
Increased a lot %	71.6	74.7	70	61.5	76.6	75	71.2
Increased %	26.2	24.5	25	33.8	23	23.2	25
Remained the same %	2	0.8	5	3.1	0.5	0.9	3.8
Decreased %	0.2	0	0	1.5	0	0.9	0
Decreased a lot %	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

(Table 4)

4. Impact of Workload on decision to continue in early childhood education and care

Especially in the context of the identified need to grow the ECEC workforce the following findings are disturbing.

Is workload affecting your decision to continue working in early childhood education and care? (by location and centre type)

	All	Location			Type		
		Metro	Region	Rural	COM	Cluster	Local Gov
Yes %	72.9	75.7	69.3	77.4	73.8	75.6	66.2
No %	27.1	24.3	30.7	22.6	26.2	24.4	33.8

(Table 5)

Almost 73 per cent of respondents – more than 300 staff – said that workload was affecting their decision to stay in the sector. Of these 52.4 per cent (67 individuals) anticipated leaving within three years and 70.7 per cent (212 individuals) within five years (Refer table 6 below).

If yes, what is the anticipated timeframe for you to leave the sector?

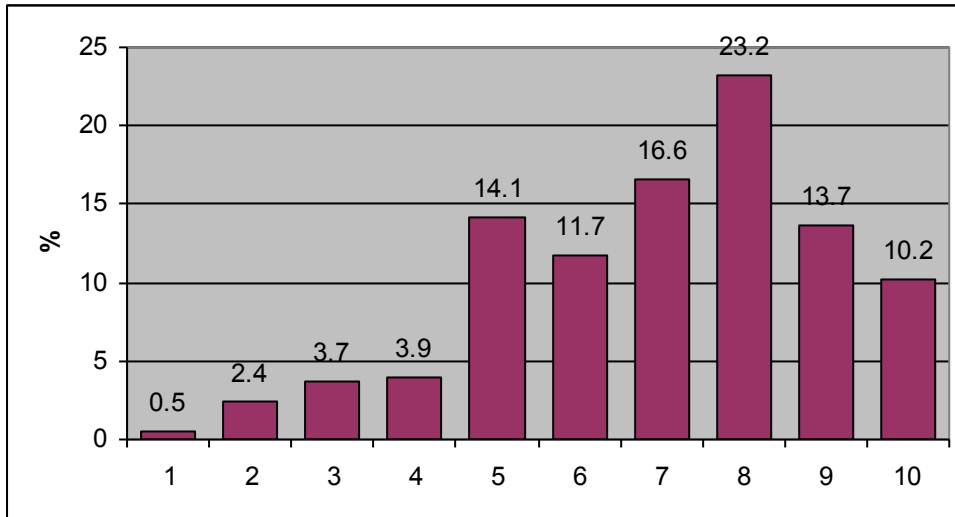
	%
Leave in the next 12 months	15.1
Leave in the next 2 years	21.5
Leave in the next 3 years	15.8
Leave in the next 5 years	18.3
Leave in the next 10 years	10.3
Other	19

(Table 6)

In the context of the stated need for an additional 600-800 early childhood teachers by 2013 to deliver universal access; this is a particularly alarming finding.

5. Sector reform agenda impacts on workload and workforce examined

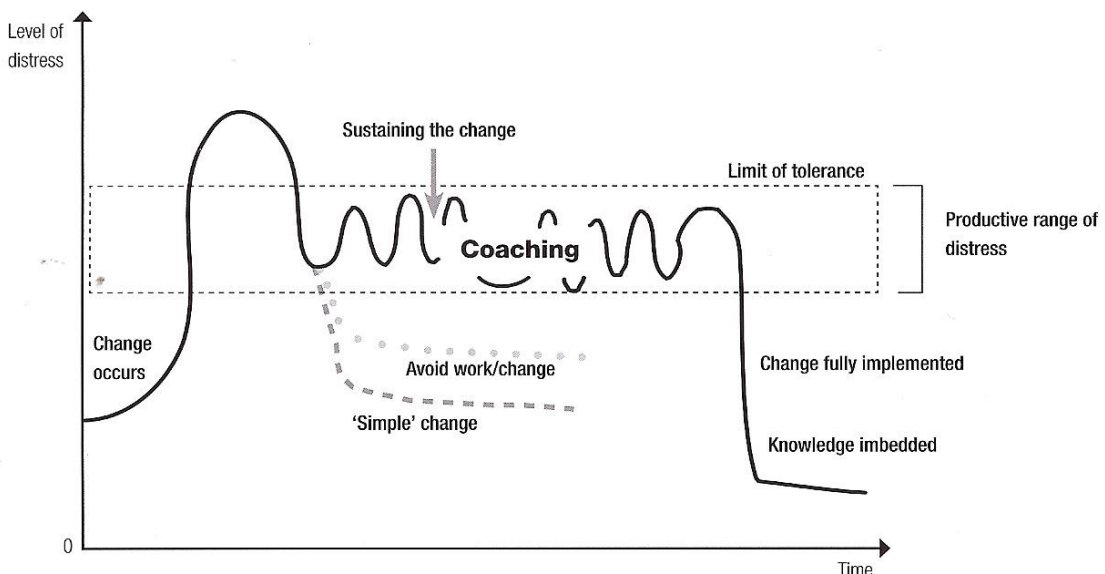
How do you feel? On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 equating to relaxed and 10 equating to distressed to the point of planning to leave the sector) how would you rate your feeling of distress in relation to the changes occurring within the sector?



(Diagram 6)

These results are disturbing. Levels of distress of this degree will have impacts well beyond the attraction and retention issues which will be raised here. They impact on the health and safety of the workforce and the interactions they have with children and families, and consequently the quality of the programs in which they engage. Such levels of distress are not sustainable nor should they be expected to be.

At the 2011 AEU Early Years Conference, Graham Hault (Auxilium) introduced participants to the work of Eva Wong. In doing so Graham explained a concept based on the belief that the common human response to change is for there to be a raised level of distress.



Source: Adapted from Eva Wong, President, Top Human Technology Ltd, China, and Ronald A Heifetz, Co-Director of Centre for Public Leadership, Harvard University

(Diagram 7)

Hoult presented the Diagram 7 above as an adaptation of Eva Wong’s model of sustaining change⁶. It introduces the concept of a productive range of distress. Simply put it describes the circumstance where people called upon to engage with and sustain change can do so in a productive manner. Importantly it relies upon them not being required to go beyond their limit of tolerance and to be supported.

With 47.1 per cent of respondents (198 individuals) indicating a level of distress at 8 or above, this in our view indicates that for many of them they are at or beyond their limit of tolerance. This is reflected in their response to the question exploring the impact of workload on their decision to remain in the ECEC sector (ref Table 5 and Table 6).

What is it about the changes that is increasing your level of distress?

	%
Hours required	85.3
The number of changes	73.9
Degree of consultation on implementation	56.3
Uncertainty over implementation process	52
The pace of change	48
Degree of personal support	46.6
Low level of control	45.6
Perceived value of change	45.4
Degree of professional stimulation	17.8

(Table 7)

What is important to note from the results at Table 7 above is that the matters which most distress respondents are those associated with the process of change rather than the substance of the changes. The temptation for some to take refuge in the argument that ‘change is a difficult process and more so for an ageing workforce’ is to deny the insight these results provide into addressing the workforce challenges recognised by a wide range of stakeholders.

The number and pace of change has been set by governments. Departmental staff at both state and commonwealth level have made brave endeavours to provide opportunities for ECEC staff to engage with the reform agenda. However timelines and resources have resulted in much of what has been and is on offer (information sessions, consultations, and training) being offered out of hours or to a limited few charged with the responsibility of sharing the information with others in their workplace.

Respondents to the AEU survey tell us first and foremost it is the extra hours required of them to engage with and implement the reform agenda which is most distressing (85.3 per cent). The number and pace of change coupled with feelings of uncertainty of how it will be implemented compound this problem.

Comments by a number of respondents indicate that job satisfaction is being undermined by the unaddressed workload impacts of change. Some of these are provided below:

“The stress associated with never feeling like I am on top of what needs to be done because there are never enough hours in a day, paid or unpaid.”

⁶ Graham Hoult, Coaching Educators IARTV, Occasional Paper Dec 2005 No.93

"The sheer amount of time (especially with the new quality assessment) and not feeling like I know enough about it is impacting on me"

"Each change is good in itself but that all changes are stacked on top of each other is overwhelming."

"The amount of time it's taking me to learn about and implement the changes is impacting on my planning time and I worry that the quality of my programming will be jeopardised due to this."

"The changes are great, but I feel I am worrying about all the admin stuff and my interactions which I value as number one has reduced from excellent to O.K."

"The focus has been taken off the children while I grasp the changes. I have now reached a point where I have put all my focus back to the children and the written stuff is falling behind and I am quite overwhelmed and stressed by this."

"There is a lack of time to do it all well. Huge amounts of reading involved - so many booklets /info sessions etc. Too many parts are required for me to blend into a workable efficient planning method. Resource back up is all there, but the time to absorb it and practice it is not. First attempts at doing things differently always take more time than when you've done it several times before. Trying to do the best you can and knowing that it's not as good as you'd like is stressful. Time to practice is necessary. And that eats into my personal home time - my own kids and husband are being ignored while I try to get my head around it all. They are getting really annoyed at me and want me to leave the profession."

"It is quite simply too much: too much to read, to learn about, talk about, change about, consider, in the given time frame compared to the number of hours in the day. Where is the time and pay to do it all? And I also have a life outside of kindergarten. It is quite simply too, too, too much!"

"There is the expectation that changes can be accommodated and implemented on top of the daily demands of running a preschool/day care centre. There is a lack of networked professional support and pastoral care available to help implement changes."

"The increase in the workload is endless. More time to given to children to access kindergarten but lack of appropriate planning time given to staff to accommodate changes, additional duties etc."

"I think the changes to the sector are positive and fantastic for all involved. It is the extra unpaid workload that is a stress to me and my work colleagues."

"I'm not sure how long I can keep this energy level up."

"I'm unsure how long I can maintain the current pressures and workload."

"When I anticipate leaving the sector will depend if the workload keeps on increasing I may leave within the next 2 years."

Without the necessary time to unpack, reflect and engage with the new agenda (frameworks, standards etc.), individually and with colleagues as work place teams, staff are left feeling uncertain.

"I am feeling that I don't know how to do some of the things expected of me - such as NQA- and that other people look to me for the answers."

"There is this fear of not getting it right or misinterpreting some of the information."

There is no time to effectively get our heads around it all and make the changes. If you want to do something you need to do it well or what is the point?

It is difficult to obtain peer support on a daily basis to discuss changes and implementation – there is no time provided.

6. Conclusion

The AEU Survey informs us that early childhood teachers and assistants in general aren't saying they don't like where we're heading. It's about the process by which we're getting there, and the expectations being placed on the sector.

It's putting greater pressure on staff, and it's all falling into their own time. The agenda is a positive one, but it has to be matched by the resources and arrangements to support people through it. If these are not addressed, all the investment in trying to attract people into the sector will be wasted because we are haemorrhaging staff at the other end.

Negotiating the successors to the Local Government Early Childhood Education Employees Agreement 2009 and the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Assistants Agreement 2009 will be an important part of dealing with workload and therefore workforce issues. However, with expiry dates of December 2012 and January 2013, their impact is longer term.

State and Federal Governments are developing Early Years Workforce Strategies which focus on: communication strategies to promote careers in the sector; promote training and pathways; increase uptake of training initiatives and development of flexible models of training; promote the professionalism of the sector to the wider community; support development and leadership opportunities; provide scholarships, incentives and mentoring programs. All positive and worthwhile if targeted and resourced.

But the findings of our workload survey clearly show that these strategies alone will not be enough. Something must be done urgently to address the workload of staff.

An important challenge, and therefore context for any effective workforce strategy, is to acknowledge and respond to the real day-to-day 'coal face' impacts of implementation of the early childhood reform agenda. Workload is one such impact. Government must work in partnership with relevant stakeholders to examine ways in which it can utilise the tools it has as regulator and funder to find shorter term solutions.