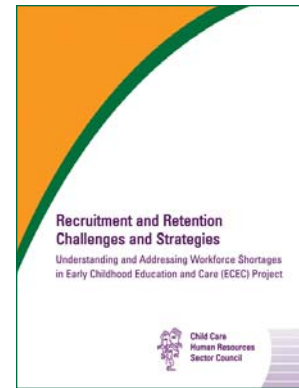


Executive Summary

Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Strategies

The *Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Strategies* Report is the fourth in a series of reports produced as part of the CCHRSC's *Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in ECEC* Project. The report finds that reducing the high turnover rates of trained early childhood educators (ECEs) is the key to developing effective strategies to address workforce shortages in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector.



The research and analysis from the *Shortages Project* demonstrates that retention—not recruitment—is the predominant problem in the sector's ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. This is because recruitment challenges are primarily caused by staff turnover, with close to nine out of ten new recruits being required to replace existing staff. As a result, employers must constantly search for new recruits in order to maintain services, let alone expand service delivery. Stemming the outflow of trained staff will help reduce the time spent on recruiting new employees, improve the quality of services, and improve the working conditions of those who remain.

ECEC Retention Factors

Research on worker retention in the general labour force indicates that as wages rise, the quit rate falls and non-wage factors such as job satisfaction become less important. However, quit rates seem to be related to job satisfaction particularly at low-wage levels. This is an important consideration for the ECEC sector, where wages are often low and focusing on increasing job satisfaction may be key to retaining staff.

Project research showed that a number of factors influence retention in the ECEC sector, for example:

- More flexible work arrangements tended to improve retention. This could be because the ECEC workforce is predominantly female, and research on the general workforce shows that monetary factors matter less for women, while working conditions and flexibility play a greater role in their job preferences.
- A rise in the number of spaces in the centre was positively associated with tenure. This might be because most centres tend to be relatively small, so the disincentives of working for a large company do not apply to the ECEC sector. There could also be positive benefits to having more spaces—and therefore workers—in terms of possibilities for work flexibility and mobility. Larger centres might also offer more job security.
- Working in a multi-location centre was negatively associated with longer tenure, suggesting that once the operation expands to many locations some positive attribute is lost or negative attributes start to dominate.
- Job tenure increased with the average number of hours worked in the centre. The stated desire for fewer work hours was generally associated with lower retention problems and more work hours was associated with longer tenure.
- ECEs and early childhood educator assistants (ECEAs) often had distinct differences in their relationship to the same factors. For example, workplace flexibility was associated with a higher retention of ECEAs rather than ECEs; and more daily hours of work were associated with higher retention for ECEAs, while more days in operation were associated with longer tenure for ECEs. And ECEs responded more to higher quality than ECEAs.

The Role of Human Resource Management in Job Satisfaction & Retention

Human resource management practices can influence workers' overall job satisfaction and their satisfaction with pay. For the ECEC sector, there is evidence that the quality of work life is important to job satisfaction. Factors such as collegiality among co-workers, supervisor support, the decision-making structure, professional growth opportunities, goal consensus, communication, and flexibility have a positive impact, while stress and burnout are commonly identified as negative attributes of the workplace.

In general, the literature indicates that:

- On-going learning, job autonomy and working in teams have positive effects on job satisfaction.
- Giving workers a 'voice' through employee involvement schemes has a positive effect on job satisfaction.
- Managers who hold regular meetings with employees to enable them to express their views about work have a substantial effect in raising job satisfaction.
- Close supervision of work is disliked, but workers prefer some assessment of their performance, suggesting that some monitoring is desirable.
- Satisfaction with pay is higher where performance-related pay and seniority-based reward systems are in place.
- A pay structure that is perceived to be unequal is associated with a substantial reduction in overall job satisfaction and their satisfaction with pay.
- The use of fixed-term contracts is associated with lower reported job satisfaction levels.
- Satisfaction levels appear to differ little between employees working part- and full-time.

Although retention is the primary issue, even if the turnover rate is reduced to levels in other occupations, many people will continue to leave the ECEC sector. Therefore it is important to improve recruitment of employees as well. Changes in human resource management practices could provide fairly low-cost and effective strategies for reducing recruitment and retention challenges in the ECEC sector, especially since these practices tend to be less well developed in small organizations. The CCHRSC could play an important role in fostering practices that will have a significant impact on job satisfaction, quit rates and therefore, retention and recruitment problems in the sector.

All provinces and territories have policies and programs that directly or indirectly impact the recruitment and retention of ECEs. However, it is difficult to determine which policies and programs have been the most effective since the majority have only recently been rolled out. The best choices for the sector are policies and programs aimed at increasing the quantity of trained ECE workers, which would improve the general quality of ECEC services.

Recommendations

The implication of the research contained in the *Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Strategies Report* and earlier reports is that workforce shortages in the ECEC sector are more likely to occur than in other sectors and more likely to persist longer without action to address the underlying factors that cause workforce shortages. The following recommendations are among those identified by the Centre for Spatial Economics (C4SE) as effective strategies for changing the primary factors that cause workforce shortages in the ECEC sector. The recommendations are limited to changes to the existing system. They do not deal with systemic, funding, or wage level changes—strategies that lie outside the scope of this project. A full list of recommendations can be found in the report, *Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care Project: Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Strategies*.

- The CCHRSC should support employers to (and employers themselves are encouraged to) improve human resource management practices that will lead to increased job satisfaction. This is likely to have a large impact on ECE quit rates, and therefore improve both quantity and quality of services. Multi-location centres in particular could reduce turnover by improving human resources management practices.

(Recommendations cont'd)

- Employers should take the following steps to improve recruitment & retention wherever possible:
 - Improve the flexibility of hours of work and working conditions.
 - Provide in-kind transfers—such as lower-cost child care—that could reduce work-related costs and have a positive impact on labour supply and retention.
 - Provide organized vacation, sick day and training relief. Relief programs could be organized over several child care centres to maximize the benefits at lower costs.
 - Recognize ECE staff through appreciation days, awards, certificates, and other means.
 - Examine Pfeffer’s list of best practices to see if there are additional ways they could improve the work environment, reduce turnover, and improve retention.
 - Work with other employers/child care centres to share best practices in employee retention practices and allow experienced members from one centre to mentor members at another centre.
 - Specific professional development (PD) days should be identified and attempts made to coordinate them with PD days in the education system to reinforce the early learning aspect of the sector. The PD days could be government- or employer-funded.

Selected recommendations and considerations related to training, professionalization, recognition, health and safety, prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) and other areas are detailed below.

Training

- Ongoing training of ECEs should be facilitated and supported, as has been done through a number of provincial/territorial initiatives. Distance education is an effective way to increase the education of an ECEC workforce in relatively isolated places.
- Bursaries should be provided for leaders to improve their human resource management practices and as a way of helping ECEs see a future in the sector.
- Quality of ECEC services likely would be improved by an increase in the proportion of ECE trained workers. Funding that encourages ECE trained workers to enter and/or stay in the ECEC workforce could provide significant benefits. Examples of this type of program include loan forgiveness and educational wage supplements.

Professionalization

- The formation of the College of ECEs in Ontario should result in improved perceptions regarding the professional nature of the ECEC occupation. This approach could be replicated elsewhere.
- One of the main ways to professionalize the ECEC sector is to improve the quality standards. The City of Toronto has taken a step to achieving this by undertaking quality evaluations of participating child care centres. This would partly solve the information asymmetry between parents who cannot observe quality and ECEC workers who can, enabling the centres with high quality ratings to charge more for their services and thereby improve the wages of their workers, and reduce staff turnover.

Recognition

- Public education and promotion campaigns are methods of expanding the potential ECEC applicant pool. An increased inflow of people taking ECE training, however, will not in and of itself necessarily lead to an improvement in the flow into the sector or the retention of workers once in the sector. Therefore, these campaigns need to be supplemented with other changes to be fully effective.
- Several province/territories are moving or examining the move of part of the ECEC sector into the education sector, which may help change perceptions about the profession.

Health and Safety

- Quality standards in child care centres could be improved by providing centres with funding for health and safety renovations which at least one province/territory currently does. This would help allay concerns among parents about health hazards at the centres. Policy makers should also investigate the increasing licensing exemptions child care centres are being granted as this is harming the reputation of the sector.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

- Many provinces/territories have implemented schemes to recognize credits from other provinces/territories. Manitoba has been using current competencies assessment and PLAR from a workplace perspective and attempting to incorporate new Canadians into the system. This approach could significantly broaden the available pool of new workers.

Other Recommendations/Considerations

- Data collection should be improved in the ECEC sector so that current and future workforce shortages can be better localized and identified.
- Where possible, students could be given an opportunity to experience working at a child care centre over the summer vacation. This would also allow the regular workers time for vacation or professional development ECEC workers see they have a future in the sector.
- Project research showed that non-profit centres had higher retention rates. This should be examined further to determine retention-improving attributes so that general regulations or human resource management practices can be adjusted.
- The CCHRSC (or provincial governments or child care associations) could provide a central job registry on the internet to advertise jobs in larger geographic areas and allow job seekers to apply for employment that is the most economically advantageous.
- An ECEC pension should be established to encourage workers to invest in a career in the sector.
- Trained ECE workers who left the sector could be offered re-entry bonuses.
- Explore reducing the financial costs of working in ECEC. For example, payroll taxes are considered to be regressive and have a larger impact on low wage sectors. Any increase in the basic exemption or increase in the threshold for the lowest income tax bracket or decline in the lowest tax rate could also have a disproportionately large impact on the net benefits of working in ECEC. Reductions in the cost of working would also have a positive impact on the supply of ECEC workers. Increased public transit subsidies or increased transit deduction would likely have a positive effect on the ECEC labour supply. Increases in child care cost subsidies would also likely have a positive impact on the ECEC labour supply.

For more information or to order print versions of this document, contact the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC):

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