

Child Care Worker	South Australia
ASCO Code: 6312-11	January 2008
Labour market rating	Shortage
Comment	

Occupational demand

Aggregate demand for child care services continues to increase, stimulating steady growth in the South Australian child care industry. According to the SA Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), there were 322 licensed child care centres operating across the state in December 2007, compared to 304 in December 2006, representing a 6 per cent increase. Quarterly ABS Labour Force Survey data show solid growth in the number of employed child care workers (irrespective of educational qualifications) between November 2006 and November 2007.

Occupational supply

A significant percentage of child care workers have no formal qualifications, while around 40 per cent hold Certificate III level or higher qualifications. Current state award classification and pay structures determine that only persons with a Diploma in Children's Services, or an equivalent qualification recognised by licensing authorities, may be classified as a Children's Services Professional, or in other words, a 'qualified' child care worker. The number of persons commencing relevant diploma studies increased strongly over the three years to 2006, although the drop-out rate is relatively high. Nonetheless, the supply of child care workers with diploma level qualifications has been steadily improving, with 75 completions in 2006 – the highest annual level recorded to date. DEEWR projections suggest that there were around 100 completions in 2007. Under current state licensing arrangements, child care centres must meet prescribed ratios of qualified child care workers versus the number of children in care at any one time. Where such ratios cannot be met (for example, due to a shortage of qualified staff) a request for an exemption must be lodged with the licensing and standards unit of DECS. According to the latter, the number of staffing exemptions in December 2007 was 48 per cent higher compared to a year earlier.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A survey of recently advertised vacancies for Diploma-qualified child care workers showed that 69 per cent of vacant jobs were filled within six weeks. Whilst this represented an improvement compared to the previous report in January 2005 (39 per cent), recruitment difficulties remain. On average, there were around seven applicants per vacancy, but only 0.9 suitable applicants per vacancy. The main reason for rejecting unsuitable job applicants was lack of suitable qualifications, while lack of relevant experience was also a factor in a small number of instances. Most contacts agreed that child care workers are poorly paid, especially given the level of responsibility required, particularly in supervisory roles. Remuneration levels are therefore the most commonly cited reason for the difficulty in retaining workers within the occupation. Poaching occurs within the industry and this contributes to turnover rates, while occupational wastage – related to pay and conditions – also impacts on demand. Anecdotal evidence indicates that wastage is further exacerbated by child care workers who, with additional study, move into early childhood teaching roles. A small number of child care centres contacted for this report indicated that they were either currently operating with an exemption from the state licensing and standards department, or would be forced to apply for one in the near future, due to the inability to attract qualified staff.

Labour market outlook

Demand for child care services is expected to remain strong and this is reflected in the rising number of government-funded places in early childhood education and care in 2007-08. Training commencements have also been rising but the high drop-out rate and continuing high levels of occupational wastage are likely to result in child care worker shortages persisting over the short-term.