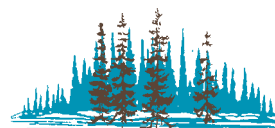


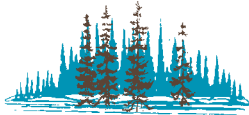
Advancing the
Educational Preparation
and Professional
Development of Alberta's
Early Learning and Care
Workforce

Summary Report
September, 2014



The Muttart Foundation





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The Educational Preparation and Professional Development of Alberta's Early Learning and Care Workforce

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Copies of the full discussion paper are available from the Muttart Foundation upon request or online at www.muttart.org/reports.

Introduction

The importance of the early years and the increasing number of young children who participate in non-parental care outside of the family home highlight the need to ensure that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and care. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners agree that well-prepared early childhood educators are central to the high-quality environments and experiences that shape children's early learning. And yet despite this agreement, many of the staff who work in early learning and care settings are still only modestly prepared and poorly paid in comparison to educators who work with older children.

In 2001, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), mindful of the growing gap between the educational and social demands placed on early childhood educators and their ability to respond to these demands, advised its member countries, including Canada, to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and well-supported early childhood education and care workforce.

The Government of Alberta recognized this challenge in its *Together We Raise Tomorrow: An Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development* platform (Government of Alberta, 2013), released in June 2013. The platform, which outlines how the province might best advance the early childhood development of its youngest citizens, highlights the need for workforce planning as one of the key enablers required for change to occur.

Consistent with this focus, the Muttart Foundation has prepared the current summary paper (as well as the larger discussion paper on which it is based) to begin the process of rethinking how the Alberta early learning and care workforce might best be developed to meet the

needs of children and their families. The paper considers the knowledge, skills and competencies early childhood educators (including certificated teachers) require to deliver high-quality learning and care for children below the mandatory school age, as well as the educational preparation and professional learning requirements that supports these bodies of knowledge, skills and competencies.

The ideas the paper presents are best considered as starting points for further discussions on how to advance the education and professional learning for the early learning and care workforce in Alberta.



The Alberta Early Learning and Care Workforce

Responsibility for early learning and care in Alberta is shared between the Ministry of Human Services and the Ministry of Education. Child care, preschool, out-of-school care and family day homes operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Services. Early Childhood Services (ECS), which include services for children from 2.5 years of age who have an identified special need and kindergarten, are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. There are significant differences in how services under the two ministries are funded and delivered - differences that extend to the preparation and support of their respective workforces.

The Ministry of Human Services – Early Learning and Care Workforce

Early learning and care services under the Ministry of Human Services are funded mainly through parent fees, with provincial operating support provided to accredited programs. Parent subsidies are available for families with lower household incomes. Private organizations, both for-profit and non-profit, deliver the bulk of these services. Families have no entitlements to service.

Educational Preparation

Staff in licensed child care, out-of-school care programs and preschool programs have one of three levels of qualification or an equivalency assessed by the Alberta Child Care Staff Certification Office (Government of Alberta, 2013).

- *Child Development Assistant*: completion of the Child Care Orientation Course; completion of courses through Alberta high schools CTS program; or completion of a 45-hour (3 credit) college-level course in child development.
- *Child Development Worker*: completion of a one-year Early Learning and Child Care certificate program offered by an Alberta public college, or an equivalent level of training.
- *Child Development Supervisor*: completion of a two-year Early Learning and Child Care diploma program, or an equivalent level of training.

The equivalencies for Child Development Worker certification include degree programs (e.g. Nursing) and diploma programs (e.g. Educational Assistant) in related fields while those for Child Development Supervisor certification include an Alberta Permanent Teaching Certificate and other related degree and diploma programs.

Once obtained, certification does not expire and there are no renewal requirements.

The Ministry of Human Services also regulates family day home services (also known as family child care). Family day home providers are not required to complete formal post-secondary training or hold specified educational qualifications.

Professional Development

Staff in licensed child care, preschool and out-of-school care programs have limited opportunities for professional development. The Ministry supports some professional development through organizations such as the Alberta Child Care Association, ECE university and college programs, the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE) as well as private consultants. Much of this professional development takes the form of individual workshops that cover knowledge and technical skills. Evidence of professional development is one of the standards incorporated in the provincially supported voluntary accreditation process.

The Ministry of Education – Early Childhood Services Workforce

Early Childhood Services (ECS) under the Ministry of Education are publicly funded and delivered through schools as well as approved non-profit providers (Friendly, Halfon, Beach & Forer, 2013). Children with special needs access services from approved operators. All children are entitled to attend a part-day, publicly funded kindergarten program in the year prior to school entry.

Educational Preparation

Teachers in ECS programs hold a valid Alberta teaching certificate which requires four years of university study (Bachelor of Education) or a bachelor degree combined with a teacher preparation program. They are not required to complete a certificate of training or specialization in early childhood education.

Workforce Professional Development

Certificated teachers participate in ongoing professional learning as part of an annual professional growth plan, with support from both the Ministry of Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association. Local school divisions and individual schools also support professional development opportunities. Much of the professional development available takes the form of workshops or specified learning days.



Core Competencies for Early Childhood Educators

The central role early childhood educators play in the delivery of high-quality early learning and care is widely acknowledged (UNICEF, 2008). The ability of early childhood educators to build relationships with young children and to create stimulating learning environments is foundational to their work. Early childhood educators require an appropriate knowledge and skill base, the right attitudes and values, the ability to think critically, to exercise judgment and to communicate effectively with a range of stakeholders (Van Laere, Peeters & Lund, 2012; Rychen & Salganick, 2003). As ‘reflective practitioners’ early childhood educators must continually evaluate what they do and how they do it (Moss, 2006; Urban, Vandenberg, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011).

The European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture argues that the service environments, or systems, in which early childhood educators work must also be organized and financed in ways which enable staff to deliver high-quality early education and care (Urban, Vandenberg, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011). The Directorate General emphasizes the need for ‘competent service systems’ that support (and value) the work of early childhood educators, ensuring that appropriate service guidelines are in place and that staff working conditions and compensation match their roles and responsibilities (Van Laere, Peeters & Lund, 2012).

Despite these findings, much of the early learning and care available in Canada, and beyond, is organized and supported in ways which make the delivery of high-quality early learning and care challenging. There are divisions in services for younger and older preschool age children (Bennett, 2003; Moss, 2006; Oberhuemer, 2005; Friendly et al, 2006), relatively low levels of public investment

(UNICEF, 2008), and many of the staff who work with young children are modestly prepared and poorly compensated.

Considering the complex nature of children’s early learning (Goffin, 2013), seven main areas of competence for early childhood educators stand out.

Caring Ethically

Caring is central to work with young children and their families (Bredenkamp & Goffin, 2012). Education with care deeply engages and motivates young children to learn, develop and flourish (Noddings, 2013). Caring relationships enable early childhood educators to support children’s active participation in their own learning and ensure that they receive the “generous amounts of attention and support” they need (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, 2).

Early childhood educators require a strong knowledge of the values and practices of caring (including sensitivity, trust and reciprocity) and must evaluate their own practices to ensure they reflect an ethic of care (Held, 2006). They must care about and for all the children and families with whom they work.

Early childhood educators must further take care of their own health and well-being. Poor adult emotional and physical health can negatively impact on children’s development. Despite this finding, research from the US reveals that many early childhood educators experience poverty, ill-health and depression – all conditions that can prevent them from meeting the needs of the young children in their care (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011; National Scientific Council on the Developing Children, 2004).

A Knowledge of How Young Children Learn and Develop

Early childhood educators need a strong knowledge of how children learn and develop. They must link their knowledge of child development to effective early educational practices (pedagogies) (Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009), while taking into account children's individual learning needs as well as their social and cultural backgrounds (National Association of Educators of Young Children (NAEYC), 2012).

Competent staff have a deep understanding of how different approaches can support children's learning (Urban, Vandembroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011), and are comfortable in sharing this understanding with the families and communities with whom they work. Early childhood educators' creative use of early learning approaches that include mathematics, science, outdoor education, music and movement and the visual arts helps them develop the rich, diverse learning environments in which young children thrive.

The rapid growth in the science of early learning means that early childhood educators must continue to expand their knowledge and skills by staying current with advances in areas such as neuroscience, theories of self-regulation (Shanker, 2010), as well as first and second language development (Whitebook and Ryan, 2011). Recent studies in both the US (reported in Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2009) and Canada (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012), however, find that staff often lack the knowledge and skills they require to promote language-rich learning environments and are not well-prepared to work with new immigrant children and their families.

Working with Curricular Resources

The increased use of curricular resources in early learning and care settings means that staff must interpret, use and reflect on these resources as part of their daily work. The emphasis these resources place on children as active learners requires staff to develop relationships and environments which support children's early learning in dynamic and interactive ways, while also documenting and assessing the nature of the learning that takes place.

The understanding that learning in the early years happens through play requires early childhood educators to design and support intentional playful approaches as part of their work. They must further consider and reflect on how their own understandings of children as early learners shape and inform their work (Langford, 2010).

In the absence of an understanding of the possibilities that a curriculum framework brings to their work, early childhood educators can resort to basic, repetitive practices which are ill-suited to young children's learning needs and interests (NAEYC 2012; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011; Urban, Vandembroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011).

Working with Families

Building close relationships with children's families forms an important part of the early childhood educators' work (NAEYC, 2012). High-quality early education and care programs welcome family members and engage them in the learning that takes place (Wilson, 2013). Staff must seek to understand, value and learn from the families and communities they serve and consider how they can best build on a family's assets and strengths to support children's early learning (Bernhard, 2012; DECET, 2008).

The growing cultural and linguistic diversity of Canadian families, the increasing number of aboriginal children in early learning settings, changing family structures and the large number of families marginalized by poverty make it important that early childhood educators consider how their own cultural, and social backgrounds influence their interactions with children and families (Findlay & Kohen, 2010; Leseman, 2002). Staff must be comfortable developing relationships based on trust and open communication with different types of families, while remaining aware of their own professional boundaries and obligations (Urban, Vandembroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011).

Supporting Children with Disabilities

Early childhood educators frequently work with children who have identified disabilities or who are considered 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' in their development. Inclusion of children with special needs benefits the child, the family and the broader community (Halfon and Friendly, 2013) and historically early education services have led the way in inclusive practices (Irwin, Lero & Brophy, 2004; Allen, Paasche, Langford & Nolan, 2011).

To work effectively with children with disabilities and their families, early childhood educators require specialized knowledge in identifying children with special educational needs, in supporting inclusive practices, and in working collaboratively with families and other professional staff. The Canadian Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (Flanagan & Beach, 2010) finds, however, that

many early childhood educators enter the field without these knowledge sets or skills. This finding raises concerns about staff's capacity to support children with disabilities in early learning and care settings, as well as their related ability to support their transition to school (Villeneuve et al, 2013).

Linking Research to Practice and Policy

Early childhood educators require a good understanding of how the early learning and care field connects with other related disciplines and how changing ideas and views of early childhood development shape and influence their work (Gestwicki and Bertrand, 2008). Early childhood professionals must become critical consumers of new information and develop a sense of how research and practice link at the local, provincial and national levels. An understanding of how the field is organized, funded and delivered can further help staff provide leadership in areas of practice (around important matters such as quality) and enable them to participate in policy level work (NAEYC, 2012).

Communications in Early Learning Settings

High-quality early learning and care involves positive interactions between adults and children, staff and parents, and between staff members (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). These interactions depend on different forms of communication: oral, written, informal, formal, digital, and visual and early childhood educators must reach a level of competence in each of them. At a minimum, good written and oral skills provide staff with a firm foundation from which to engage with stakeholders in ways that promote quality services and make early learning and care programs welcoming places for children and their families (Fraser, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012; Urban, Vandenberg, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011).

More broadly, the understanding that early learning and care settings are public spaces requires staff to work democratically with others, to listen well and to communicate effectively with a range of stakeholders (Allen, Paasche, Langford & Nolan, 2011).



Educational Qualifications and Professional Learning

The knowledge, skills and competencies early childhood educators bring to their work significantly impact service quality (OECD, 2006 and 2012). The formal education staff complete remains critical in supporting their development of this knowledge as well as the accompanying skills and competencies they must demonstrate (Bueno, Darling-Hammond and Gonzales, 2010; Sylva et al, 2010). Better qualified staff are more likely to create high-quality learning environments (Elliot, 2006; Sheridan, 2009) and better able to support the stable, sensitive and stimulating interactions that foster children's early learning (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011).

Educational Qualifications

The research which examines the educational preparation for early childhood educators is complex. It includes discussions of both the level and nature of formal education required to best prepare staff to work with very young children (OECD, 2012).

Level of Formal Education

Across countries, the education for early childhood educators (including certificated teachers) varies significantly from just over a week of instruction to the completion of six years of post-secondary education (OECD, 2012). There is still a common division, including in Canada, between staff who work with younger children, who have lower levels of formal education and a greater range in their qualifications, and staff who work with older pre-school children (often certificated teachers) who

hold a more common set of post-secondary qualifications (Oberhuemer, 2011).

Across Canada, certificated teachers in school-based programs hold a degree qualification, while staff who work with younger children hold qualifications that range from a post-secondary diploma to the completion of introductory courses. In the case of family child care providers there are often no formal qualifications required (Flanagan, Beach, Michal & Cormier, 2009.)

The provinces and territories further differ in the proportion of staff required to hold specific levels of qualification (e.g. a two-year diploma) in particular service settings. In contrast to other OECD jurisdictions, no Canadian province or territory requires child care staff to hold a degree qualification.

Internationally, a number of countries are working to raise the educational qualifications for early childhood education and care staff. In the United States, for example, a number of states now require prekindergarten teachers (for four-year old children) to have qualifications similar to those of public kindergarten teachers. In 2002, the New Zealand government required all staff in child care centres to seek three-year diploma or degree qualifications and be formally registered, as are kindergarten teachers, by 2012. Similarly, over a decade ago, Sweden raised the educational qualifications for its early childhood education and care workforce to a three- or four-year degree for core program staff and a three-year post-secondary professional diploma for staff in assistant positions.

A recent government commissioned report in the United Kingdom, calls for a minimum of 70 percent of the early years workforce to hold a diploma qualification, with

team leaders holding a higher qualification (Nutbrown, 2012). The European Commission Network on Childcare has set a target for 60 percent of the early education and care workforce to hold a three-year degree credential (Oberhuemer, 2011).

The move to raise educational requirements reflects research findings which shows that staff with higher levels of qualification are more likely to use approaches and practices that contribute to improved outcomes for children and their families (Barnett, 2003; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2007; Bueno, Darling-Hammond & Gonzales, 2010; and Pianta & Hadden, 2008). Staff with higher levels of formal education are also better able to engage with parents and to speak with stakeholders about the unique nature of early education and care and its value (Dalli & Rockel, 2012; Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart & Williamson, 2012).

Specialized Qualifications

A combination of higher education with an early childhood specialization is considered the best formal preparation for staff to deliver high-quality programs (Bennett, 2009; Goffin, 2013). This finding raises questions about both the use of equivalency qualifications to address staff recruitment and retention challenges (Flanagan, Beach, Michal & Cormier 2009) and the application of teaching approaches more commonly used with school-age children in early learning settings (referred to as ‘schoolification’). Some researchers further advise that the unique nature of work with infant and toddlers and with children with disabilities requires additional educational specialization (OECD, 2012).

Researchers in the US have questioned the quality and consistency of early childhood teacher preparation programs (Cho & Couse, 2008; Hyson, Horm & Winton, 2012; Tarrant, Greenberg, Kagan, & Kauerz, 2008). They argue that these programs must be of a consistently high-standard and must reflect the specialized education and training (including practicum placements) required to work with preschool-age children (Early, Maxwell, Burchinal, Alva, Bender, Bryant, & Zill’s, 2007; Cho & Couse, 2008).

Supervisors and senior staff in early education and care settings are also seen to benefit from additional formal educational preparation in management, administration and pedagogical leadership (Goffin, 2013; OECD, 2006; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). In Canada, only Manitoba currently requires

directors in full-day child care centres to have either a post-diploma certificate or degree credential; although a number of post-secondary institutions now offer leadership and management educational opportunities for early childhood educators (for example, Mount Royal University and Grant MacEwan University).

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) can help staff develop and maintain the knowledge and skills they need to work with young children. Staff with higher qualifications are more likely to engage in PD than those with lower entry-level qualifications (NAEYC, 2012); although, well-designed, comprehensive professional development opportunities increase the capacity of staff with lower levels of education to deliver high-quality services (Mathers, Eisenstadt, Sylva, Soukakou, & Ereky-Stevens, 2014).

Professional development is best supported through a comprehensive approach that includes qualifications, standards of practice, positive workplace environments, well-planned learning opportunities and public investments in continuous staff learning (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011). In most OECD jurisdictions, professional development systems (of some form) are in place for certificated teachers who work with older preschool-age children, but largely absent for staff who work with younger children in child care settings (Flanagan, Beach, & Varmuza, 2013; OECD, 2012).

As part of a more systematic approach, staff’s professional learning can link with the larger goals set-out for early learning and care at the organizational or system level and form part of a professional workplace culture that supports continuous growth and development (NAYEC, 2012). Senior staff can foster front-line staff’s continuous learning through their own participation in professional development and can further help to provide staff with opportunities for mentoring and coaching (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011).

Across Canada generally, the poor working conditions (including low rates of pay) of early childhood educators in child care settings and their modest levels of formal education are seen to have contributed to high staff turnover, a mixed commitment to professional learning and workplace cultures that do place a strong focus on staff development.

Types of Professional Development Activities

The value of traditional *professional development* activities, such as one-time, skill-based workshops, is now questioned (Loughran, 2010; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; OECD, 2012), with an emphasis instead on ongoing professional learning, the development of learning communities or communities of practice and staff coaching and mentoring (NAEYE, 2012; Russell, 2012; Dalli & Urban, 2011).

Consistent with these new approaches, the early childhood educator is seen as an active learner who continually reflects on new practice ideas and approaches. Staff have access to professional development time and resources to engage in peer discussions (Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai & Kipnis, 2009) and are encouraged to create workplace cultures that support and value ongoing learning and development (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters, & Van Laere, 2011). The US National Association for the Education of Young Children emphasizes the value of early childhood educators thinking about their own professional development as part of a broader commitment to professionalism and professional standards for the field (NAEYC, 2012).

Professional Development Requirements

Despite the importance of professional learning, it is often not a requirement for staff that work with young preschool-age children (OECD, 2012). Across Canada, professional development is more commonly mandated and supported for certificated teachers in kindergarten or preschool settings than for staff in child care. By way of exception, British Columbia requires all licensed early childhood educators to renew their 'license to practice' and to complete a minimum of 40 hours of professional development every five years. In Ontario, the College of Early Childhood Educators is expected to introduce a mandated professional development requirement in the near future linked to the College's standards of practice and code of ethics.

The introduction of early learning and care curriculum frameworks has prompted some provinces to more fully engage child care staff in professional development. In New Brunswick, for example, all early childhood educators completed 36 paid hours of professional development following the introduction of a mandated early learning curriculum framework. But again this is not the norm.

Outside of Canada, other countries have sought to advance professional development for either some or all of the staff who work with preschool-age children. In the US, for example, individual states support targeted professional development for teachers who work with preschool age children given what are seen as either underdeveloped or inconsistent teacher preparation programs. Much of this targeted professional development for preschool teachers has focused on teacher-child interactions in the areas of literacy, oral language and to a lesser extent math and science given a larger interest in ensuring young children's readiness to start school (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, 3). In New Zealand, early childhood educators must meet ongoing professional development requirements as well as completing more specific learning requirements in areas identified as priorities for development (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013).

The approaches jurisdictions take to professional development for early childhood educators reflect their larger view of the field (education versus care) as well as their related understanding of staff roles and responsibilities. Those that see early learning and care as 'educational' and staff as professionals (generally the case for certificated teachers) take a more comprehensive approach, while those that do not (often the case for early learning for very young children), either emphasize periodic, one-time training events that focus on specific knowledge and skill sets or make no provisions for staff's ongoing professional development (Dalli & Urban, 2011; Nailon, 2013).

Advancing the Educational Preparation and Professional Development of Alberta's Early Learning and Care Workforce

Based on the important role that a well-qualified, professional early learning and care workforce plays in the delivery of high-quality services, this final section outlines some options to advance the educational preparation and professional development of early childhood educators who work with children below the mandatory school age. The options proposed are intended to provide starting points for further discussions among early childhood education and care stakeholders across the province.

1. The Introduction of an Early Childhood Education and Care Degree Qualification

Staff with higher levels of formal education – a degree level program with a specialization in early childhood education – are more likely to create high-quality early learning and care environments, to provide pedagogical leadership and to support effective service delivery practices for young children and their families.

Based on the added value that staff with a degree level credential can bring to the field, it is proposed that The Ministry of Education work with post-secondary institutions, and the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education to introduce an early childhood education and care degree credential.

Students will complete the new credential through two possible routes.

First, faculties of Education will be supported to reintroduce an early childhood development focus within existing education programs. This new option will include core courses on early childhood development, early education pedagogy and work with families and communities. The degree credential will also require field placements in early learning and care settings.

Second, universities with existing early childhood education and care diploma programs will receive provincial support to develop a new four-year degree credential. The course work for this new credential will include two foundational years of study followed by two years of more advanced study. The new degree credential will include field placements in early learning and care settings.

Consideration will need to be given as to whether or not students who complete this new four-year degree credential are eligible for teacher certification and, if so, in which educational settings they are eligible to work.

2. A Two-Year Diploma as the Minimum Educational Qualification for Staff in Licensed Early Learning and Care Programs

Based on the knowledge and competencies early childhood educators require to best support children's early learning and care, the minimum educational qualification for staff in regulated early learning and care programs will rise to that of a two-year diploma.

Those public post-secondary institutions that deliver the two-year diploma will develop a range of delivery models to ensure that courses and field placements are accessible to a wide range of eligible students. Prospective diploma students will be required to meet minimum entrance requirements in core subjects including English and Mathematics.

The Ministry of Human Services will consult with early childhood education and care stakeholders to determine the timeline for the introduction of the new minimum educational requirement for staff entering the field.

3. Supporting the Existing Workforce to Meet the New Education Requirement

A significant portion of the current early learning and child care workforce holds qualifications below the level of a two-year diploma. These staff form an important part of the workforce and will have the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications to meet the proposed new minimum requirement.

It is, therefore, proposed that all current staff in licensed child care settings that do not hold a two-year diploma or equivalent qualification will be eligible for provincial bursary support to upgrade their educational qualifications through the completion of additional credit-based courses delivered through approved post-secondary colleges and universities.

The Ministry of Human Services will determine the additional courses staff certified at the Child Development Assistant and Child Development Worker levels require to meet the new minimum requirement.

Licensed child care and preschool programs that provide staff with educational leave to complete approved courses of study will be eligible for some reimbursement of replacement staffing costs.

The timelines for current staff to meet the new minimum qualification requirements will be established through consultations between the Ministry of Human Services, early learning and care stakeholders and post-secondary institutions.

4. Additional Qualifications for Staff in Management or Leadership Positions in Licensed Early Learning and Care Programs

Consistent with the important leadership and management roles senior staff in early learning and care settings play, these staff will be required to complete additional educational training or qualifications.

Two possible options are proposed.

First, staff or students will complete a new post-diploma certificate (from six to eight degree credit courses) through an approved post-secondary institution with a specific focus on management and pedagogical leadership. This new post-diploma certificate will ladder into the proposed four-year qualification.

Second, staff or students will complete a series of specialized courses as part of the proposed new four-year

early childhood education and care degree credentials or as part of existing four-year degrees with an early childhood education and care focus such as that offered at Mount Royal University.

Current staff in leadership positions will be required to meet the new educational requirements by agreed timelines developed through consultations between the Ministries of Human Services and Innovation and Advanced Education and early childhood education and care stakeholders.

Current staff will be eligible for provincial bursary support to meet these new educational requirements.

5. Increasing the Educational Qualifications for Family Day Home Providers

To deliver high-quality family day home care, service providers require levels of formal educational preparation that are similar to those required for staff in centre- or group-based services.

In recognition of this, approved family day home providers will be required to complete a new minimum qualification equivalent to that of the current one-year certificate for Childhood Development Workers. The timeline for providers to meet this new qualification will be determined through consultations between the Ministry of Human Services, post-secondary colleges and early childhood education and care stakeholders.

Over a subsequent agreed time period, also determined through consultations, the level of minimum qualification for Family Day Home providers will rise to that equivalent to a two-year diploma (the same as staff in centre-based services).

Provincial bursary funding will be available to assist approved Family Day Home providers in meeting the new educational requirements.

6. Professional Learning Requirements for Early Childhood Educators

A comprehensive, well-delivered program of ongoing professional learning provides benefit for early childhood educators and can enhance program quality.

It is, therefore, proposed that an ongoing professional learning requirement be introduced for staff in licensed early learning and care settings and for approved family day home providers. This new requirement will be similar to that in place for certificated teachers.

The form and nature of the professional learning

requirement will be determined through consultations between the Ministry of Human Services and early childhood education and care stakeholders. Over an agreed period of time, ongoing professional learning will become a requirement for continued certification as an early childhood educator and an approved family day home provider.

The implementation of Alberta's early learning curriculum framework provides one opportunity for an initial phase of professional learning for staff in licensed child care programs and approved family day home operators.

7. Early Childhood Educator Standards of Practice and a Code of Ethics

Standards of practice and a code of ethics are important ways in which a professional workforce defines its roles and responsibilities. In addition, standards of practice and a code of ethics can help to inform post-secondary early education program standards as well as professional learning requirements.

It is, therefore, proposed that the Alberta Child Care Staff Certification Office, in consultation with early childhood education and care stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and the Alberta Child Care Association, develop a standards of practice and code of ethics for the early childhood educator field that can inform the certification, professional learning and ongoing evaluation of staff.

Consideration will be given as to how the proposed standards of practice and code of ethics align with those already in place for certificated teachers who work in ECS approved programs. Further discussions are required to determine whether or not certificated teachers in ECS programs would be eligible for certification as early childhood educators.

8. Oversight of the Early Childhood Education and Care Profession

Raising the formal educational qualifications and introducing professional learning requirements for early childhood educators more closely aligns the field with that of other professions, as does the development of standards of practice and a code of ethics.

Consistent with this realignment, the Ministry of Human Services will work with early childhood education and care stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and the Alberta Child Care Association, to develop and implement an appropriate regulatory model for the field.

One option for consideration is the introduction of a self-regulatory provincial college of early childhood educators, created through provincial legislation, to protect the public interest and to oversee standards of practice and a code of ethics for the profession.

9. A Provincial Standard for Post-secondary Early Childhood Education Programs

Alberta currently has no provincial standard for post-secondary early childhood education and care programs. Broadly, the establishment of provincial standards ensures that students who graduate from post-secondary programs receive a similarly high-level of educational preparation.

It is, therefore, proposed that the Ministry of Human Services, following consultations with early childhood education and care stakeholders, including post-secondary institutions, develop and introduce provincial standards for programs that prepare diploma- and degree-qualified early childhood educators. The Ministry will undertake this work in partnership with the Ministries of Education and Innovation and Advanced Education.

10. Realigning the Educational Requirements, Remuneration and Working Environments for Early Childhood Educators

The attraction and retention of well-qualified early childhood educators into the field remains challenging given the demanding nature of the work and the relatively modest wages and benefits available for staff. New initiatives are required to better match the value of the work with staff compensation and working conditions.

It is, therefore, proposed that the Ministry of Human Services work with early childhood education and care stakeholders to determine appropriate strategies to increase the level of remuneration for qualified early childhood educators. The possible strategies to consider include the development of provincial salary guidelines for staff in licensed programs.

Further, it is proposed that the Ministry engage in similar discussions with stakeholders to consider how to support the provision of 'non-ratio' or 'non-contact' time for early childhood educators.

In both of the above, special consideration will need to be extended to the nature of the employment relationship and early learning and care practice common in family child care (day home) service models.

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