

# Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) sector survey findings

The Commission conducted an online survey of the OSHC sector between 27 April and 13 June 2023. The survey was intended to give the Commission a deeper understanding of frequently raised topics from the Commission’s prior engagement with the OSHC sector via roundtable meetings, formal submissions and informal conversations.

## About the survey

In total, 90 responses to the survey were received. Just over 50 per cent of all respondents to the survey were OSHC directors, with 40 per cent of those directors working in a school governing council-run OSHC.

The remainder of survey respondents were OSHC staff, school principals and other groups.

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to answer multiple choice questions and provide more detailed answers on specific lines of inquiry by the Commission.

## Limitations to expanding services

The first part of the survey focused on general feedback on the OSHC sector and what respondents identified as limitations to expanding their services.

Staff availability was selected as the biggest limitation to service expansion, followed by physical infrastructure and the financial viability of the OSHC service.

Respondents consistently described, in their comments to the survey, the challenge of employing enough qualified staff to meet the demand of their service.

Specifically on the question of infrastructure as a limitation to expansion, 53.4 per cent of respondents felt infrastructure was very important, with 30.1 per cent indicating it was somewhat important.

Comments from respondents as to why infrastructure plays such an important role in OSHC delivery included:

“When inadequate resources and physical infrastructure are allocated to OSHC, the frequency of children displaying challenging behaviour and absconding behaviour increases.”



“With a service with multiple neuro-diverse students we need room to move and create positive environments for them.”

“It is hard to create a sense of belonging when the space has to be shared.”

### **Specific challenges faced by rural and regional schools**

The survey also sought specific feedback on challenges faced by rural and regional schools in providing an OSHC service. Responses were wide-ranging on the reasons expansion may be difficult, but frequently raised amongst respondents was a difficulty in maintaining a service in a small school due to fluctuation in enrolment numbers.

Survey respondents stressed the sector-wide problem of finding qualified OSHC staff is exacerbated in rural and regional areas, where attracting and retaining staff with the right qualifications can be difficult.

Seasonal work patterns, rental availability and changes to migration all impacted on a service’s ability to maintain consistent numbers. A small number of staff operating an OSHC service means if staff experience illness or require leave, it can be difficult for services to maintain appropriate staffing levels. Higher fees may be charged at sites to make the service financially viable, but that makes affordability for some families difficult.

## **Innovation and collaboration**

Only 27.8 per cent of survey participants were clear on there being opportunities for innovation and collaboration within the sector to expand their services; 38.9 per cent were unsure; and 33.3 per cent did not believe there were opportunities that existed to expand. Solutions offered related mainly to improvement of staffing availability and qualifications, and an increased availability of infrastructure on school sites.

The Commission inquired into which current regulatory arrangements impact the operation and expansion of current services. Survey respondents indicated staffing qualification requirements and administrative workload were the leading reasons.

## **School governing councils**

In response to survey questions on the operation of school governing council-managed OSHC, the Commission noted a strong consistency amongst responses. Survey participants noted the limitations of having a school governing council as the approved provider for an OSHC. Respondents’ concerns related to the ability of a governing council to understand and execute both the business and regulatory requirements of OSHC operations.

There was also a consistency in responses indicating this took responsibility away from OSHC directors, who run the service on a day-to-day basis.

Comments included:

*“We are the only profession I am aware of [where]...ultimate power is given to people that do not have any experience or knowledge in the profession. OSHC Directors do not have the power to make decisions that are in the best interest of the OSHC even though they are the most experienced and knowledgeable people in the profession.”*

*“...believe there is a lack of understanding by the school of the requirements from regulatory boards. This leads to frustration from directions feeling undervalued, under supported and overworked.”*

*“...staff are employed by a body of parent volunteers who often have little to no business experience.”*


## OSHC in preschool setting

Finally, the commission sought responses on the provision of OSHC in preschool settings. Of those who responded, 41.1 per cent said their service already provided care for preschool-aged children of 4 years or more.

Many respondents indicated this was offered in partnership with preschools near the school and noted the benefits for those children who had accessed their service.

One survey response stated:

*“We have two kindergartens within a short walking distance and provide care for them before and after kindergarten days. Currently we cannot accommodate them on their pupil free days or their occasional Friday half-days. A big benefit we have observed, is that the children who attend OSHC in their preschool year appear to start their primary school year with a lot more confidence than their counterparts.”*



In response to the question of how OSHC could be expanded to preschool children more broadly, the Commission noted the responses were consistently of the view that a separate offering for preschool children was the most appropriate way to offer this service.

Respondents noted the differential care requirements a three-year-old would have, even in comparison to a four-year-old child, particularly with relation to toileting and sleep.

A survey response stated:

*“We operate a separate space for our Juniors (preschool and foundation) so they are not so overwhelmed with the older children and noise. We offer a quiet space if they are tired. We do not have any other areas we can use for our younger children. We tailor a different programme to our younger students. Toileting is an issue. Even our 4-year-olds are having regular toileting accidents or still in nappies and we don’t have purpose-built facilities. Two educators are required to deal with these instances and this impacts on our ratios with the other children.”*

The Commission thanks all survey participants for their contributions.