

An Exploration into Internal and External Factors Impacting the Quality and Quantity of Educators at Happy Haven OSHC - March 2022

The [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) opens with the following statement –

'Education has the power to transform lives'

The declaration commits all Australian governments to work with the education sector to attract, develop and retain high quality teacher and educators across all areas of the education and care sector. Children's education and care is integral and sets the foundations for lifelong learning and development.

My name is Nicholas Smith, and I am the CEO and Managing Director of Happy Haven OSHC. I have worked in OSHC since 2009, and have a double degree in Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Health Science. Happy Haven began on its first school site in January of 2015. In June of 2022, we will be operating in 56 Department for Education school sites across rural and metropolitan South Australia.

Over the past 24 months, there have been numerous disruptions, difficulties, and new challenges we have all had to face which have impacted every aspect of life. Over this time, Happy Haven OSHC has continued to grow, open new programs and provide vital services to communities, as well as employment to our educators. The ability to simply operate programs to a safe and compliant standard is becoming ever more complex and difficult. The main factor I attribute this to – lack of qualified educators. It is obviously not quite as simple as just not having enough staff, but I strongly believe I can demonstrate from our experience as South Australia's largest OSHC Provider, along with data and examples from other Providers, that the issue is having far reaching consequences and at the current rate is getting worse and not better.

Out of 578 applicants – one held a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care and was seeking a career in OSHC

As of 22nd March 2022, Happy Haven OSHC employs 474 staff. From September 2020 to March 2022, we had 578 applicants seek employment with us as an educator.

Of those 578 applicants, we hired 373 employees.

Of those 373 educators, 73 of them were qualified for South Australian Regulatory body purposes at the time of offering a position. These 73 applicants represent 100% of the Qualified staff who applied for a job with us – we have not turned down an application from a Qualified Educator in over 18 months.

Of those 73 Qualified Educators, only 8 were recognised as being Qualified due to holding a Diploma. All 8 were Diploma of Early Childhood.

Of those eight Diploma trained educators, three of them came to us to work during Vacation Care only as they held other employment during school term. One got another job within a week and didn't stay on with us. One is working for us casually but is also studying their Bachelor of Education to make the move to teaching. One is working casually for us while also working as an SSO. One was only onboarded a matter of days before preparing this report and is yet to indicate her intentions for work.

The one person who held a Diploma and wanted to work with us as their primary employer was offered a Full Time Assistant Director role. They continued in this role only for a few months before their circumstances changed and they resigned as they had moved house to suit their partner's new job.

The Diploma of Children's Services is supposed to be the 'stock standard' qualification in OSHC, however there are not enough people who hold this Diploma and who want to work in an OSHC environment. There are also not enough people currently studying towards any form of Diploma which would deem them as Qualified in an OSHC service. [National data](#) shows that in recent years:

enrolments in the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care have declined by more than 25%

Perhaps you could be thinking, “Happy Haven just isn’t advertising in the right places”, so I’ll explore that idea.

Our People & Culture (P&C) Team has grown significantly in the past 24 months, and we now have 10.5 Full-Time Equivalent employees working in this department. Currently, 18-22 hours per day are spent filling shifts and maintaining the roster for up to a week in advance.

Recruitment and Induction is second in focus only to P&C’s role in maintaining educator regulatory competencies (i.e. ensuring all Working With Children’s Checks, RRHAN-EC, First Aid and CPR are kept up to date). We advertise through numerous methods depending on the community we are seeking staff in.

We have advertised through:

LinkedIn, Seek and other recruitment websites	Employment Agencies	Local community noticeboards
Contacting individual coordinators of university courses to distribute advertisements to their cohort	Emailing over 10,000 families enrolled in Happy Haven OSHC services to state we are recruiting	Facebook (including paid advertisements reaching tens of thousands of people)
OSHC SA	University Careers Newsletters	Contacting local schools, preschools and childcare centres
Advertising through Registered Training Organisations such as TAFE	Encouraging and providing monetary incentives to our existing staff team to share details with their family and friends	Contacting football, netball and cricket clubs to promote job opportunities

Through identifying not only the lack of qualified educators seeking employment in the sector, but also the lack of quality qualified educators available, we sought to address this problem through training our own Diploma Qualified staff. Over the past 40 months, we have had 5 educators commence and complete their Diploma studies with our support, become Qualified staff, and in most cases, go on to become a Director or part of our admin team. We currently have a further 27 staff members engaged in a traineeship with us to complete their Diploma studies. In addition, we’ve had 42 Student Based Trainees commence with us and study towards a Certificate III or IV while still in secondary school. An additional 38 Student Based Trainees are signed on for 2022.

This being said, there are positive changes coming with the introduction of a new Certificate III and Diploma to better suit the needs of OSHC, but this has resulted in some short-term hurdles to engaging more trainees. The Certificate III in OSHC is not currently supported under the funded training packages for Traineeships, meaning we may not be able to continue our Student Based Trainee initiative (which was a large factor in Happy Haven being successful in winning the Medium Employer of the Year category at the South Australian Training Awards in 2021). Further to this, the four RTOs that we work with are either hesitant to accept new Diploma students, or simply refuse new enrolments. This reluctance is due to the ‘teach out’ timeframe for current students to finish their Diploma studies, before the new training comes

into place. What this means is that the students' studies completed to date would be considered null and void.

These trainees are future leaders of our OSHC programs, but this is a long-term strategy that doesn't help to fill short term gaps. How big is the gap? Large enough for the following examples:

91% of schools who Happy Haven have tendered for in the past two years have done so either to establish a brand-new service, or because they could not find sufficient staff to run the program

Across the past 24 months, Happy Haven was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to tender for 22 OSHC services in Department for Education school sites.

Of these 22 services, three had closed down and were hoping for an incoming Provider to re-establish them. A further three services had Third Party Approved Providers take on the running of the service in a caretaker role while they went through the outsourcing process to prevent them from closing. Six services were school communities wanting to establish an OSHC program where one did not previously exist. A further seven schools explicitly said they were outsourcing the OSHC as their Director had resigned and they were unable to recruit a replacement. That left only two services out of those twenty-two who didn't report outsourcing of the OSHC due to staff difficulties or weren't setting up a new program from scratch.

Could it be that Happy Haven is the only third-party Provider with this problem? That we have a reputation and retention issue? Data shows that the approval of Staffing Waivers has doubled over the past three and a half years. South Australia has the highest proportion of Waivers in the country, with OSHC Waivers in South Australia being practically double the national average (7.7% of Services in SA vs. National Average of 3.8% - <https://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/waivers.html>). There has historically been a lack of direction and recognition from a government level in South Australia with regards to workforce planning. South Australia, along with the Northern Territory, were the last two states / territories to develop a National Quality Framework Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy. Other states began working on such a strategy as early as 2009 (Victoria). There is now a National Workforce Strategy (for 2022-2031), however the Qualification determinations still differ from state to state, with South Australia having the strictest qualification requirements in the country.



Happy Haven’s challenges in having sufficient Qualified Educators are likely greater than those of other Providers in the state due to our willingness to offer services in communities where other Providers do not.

When comparing Happy Haven’s service demographics to two other large providers in the South Australian OSHC market, the following is true:

26% of Happy Haven’s programs are licensed for 40 children or more. For Company X this number is 72%, and for Company Y is 95%. 39% of Happy Haven’s services are considered Small by the Education Standards Board (24 places or fewer).

Happy Haven’s services have a [60% metropolitan to 40% rural split](#), compared to 70% / 30% for both Company X and Company Y. Happy Haven run 18% of our services deemed to be in ‘outer regional areas’ vs. 3% for Company X and 4% for Company Y. (Nationally, [10% of all education and care services](#) in outer regional, remote and very remote areas have a staffing waiver in place).

Happy Haven also run twice as many programs in DfE schools of Category 1 & 2 than Company X and Company Y do.

In addition to this, Qualified Educator shortage has resulted in many of our services placing caps on bookings, with families in need of care getting turned away on a daily basis.

We try extremely hard to improve educator and staff job satisfaction and retention, with some examples of our efforts below:

Flexible working arrangements for those who are studying or have other employment	Engagement with an Employee Access Program which, among other benefits, offers free counselling to staff	Subscription to a Recognition and Rewards program (Perkbox) which provides staff with discounts to hundreds of goods and services, and a forum for public acknowledgment of success in its many forms
Having a policy of not cancelling the shifts of casual educators	Offering permanent employment to a large portion of our staff	Employing Service Directors, paid significantly more than the ‘Coordinators’ of other Providers
Engaging with behavioural psychologists to provide on the job training and mentoring to educators	Both face to face and remote Professional Development opportunities, run internally and by external agencies	Over staffing services through having Directors surplus to ratio, employing Trainees and accessing funding to better support children with additional needs
Conducting a wellbeing survey to get a better understanding of educator’s perception of their job with us	Running staff events such as evenings at Latitude or the drive-in	

The implications of a lack of quality Qualified Educators in the sector can be demonstrated both statistically and anecdotally. When looking at Assessment and Rating results, South Australia are lagging well behind the other states. South Australia has 24% of its services rated as Working Towards NQS, the [highest rate of Working Towards in the country](#). Reflecting on our own services, we've had a mixed track record since the new interpretation of the National Quality Framework in 2018. Prior to this we had achieved only ratings of 'Exceeding National Quality Standards' or 'Meeting National Quality Standards'. Since 2018, we have been rated as 'Meeting' in many services, but also 'Working Towards National Quality Standards' in a number of services.

There is a clear trend in our own results:

Working Towards in Rural Services	71% of those Directors were working other jobs and/ or studying; 29% were working for Happy Haven as their primary commitment
Meeting in Rural Services	100% of Directors working for Happy Haven as their primary commitment
Working Towards in Metropolitan Services	75% of these were Directors studying towards a Bachelor of Education, 25% were working with Happy Haven as their primary commitment
Meeting in Metropolitan Services	9% of Directors studying towards their Bachelor of Education; the other 91% were finished in their studies and working for Happy Haven as their primary commitment

According to the ['Shaping Our Future: Children's Education and Care National Workforce Strategy'](#) document,

OSHC is a difficult industry to attract and retain high quality educators to

Out of School Hours Care Providers experience significant workforce challenges – particularly so in states and territories that have higher staffing and qualification requirements (e.g. South Australia who has the strictest requirements nationally). The industry workforce is transient with very high staff turnover (nationally, 23% of educators have been working at their service for less than one year). We are competing with Child Care Centres, Schools and other industries who can offer more hours at a higher pay rate without the need for family-unfriendly 6:30-8:30am and 3:00-6:00pm split shifts. Of our 474 employees, when we discount staff who are Directors or in administration, we have only 9 employees (less than 2%) who are not studying, not working another job, and who have us as their primary commitment.

Almost a quarter of our employees work in a school as well as with us in OSHC and around three quarters of our workforce is currently involved in some form of study

Some schools are fantastic at supporting their staff to also work in OSHC, allowing start and finish times to accommodate getting to OSHC for the entirety of the session to ensure educator-child ratios are met. Many schools are rigid in requiring their SSO's to work beyond the end of the school day, meaning they essentially cannot work after school with us as we legally require the educators to be on site for the entirety of the session. It is then also incredibly difficult to get access to staff outside of working hours. Once an educator has completed contact hours at university or another RTO, worked at their 'main' job, undertaken their After School Care shift with us, they are either unwilling or unable to commit to coming to Professional Development sessions, staff meetings or similar. We also face the added complexity of navigating University Teaching Placements. From the beginning of May until the end of July 2021, Happy Haven had 44 Qualified Educators on their third year teaching placements. In August and September 2021, we had 36 fourth year university students on placement.

This constant lack of sufficient Qualified Educators results in those who are available being worked to their limit, being placed in every shift they are available for. Most do not wish for this to be the case and would rather work fewer hours than we require / request so they can better balance work / life / study. At the end of a teaching placement period, it is not uncommon for us to have a Qualified Educator who was not on placement resign or ask to step back, citing burnout. We have educators who are eligible to become Qualified, but who state they do not want to, as they don't want the responsibility and required work hours that come with it. We have educators who are deemed Qualified by virtue of sitting in a lecture theatre at university for two years but have no experience actually working with children. They are then underprepared when they enter the workforce, and as mentioned above, getting access to their time for training and development is not easy. This culminates in unqualified educators stepping up and picking up the slack of an underperforming Qualified educator, which often leaves them feeling undervalued, underpaid, and frustrated.

The following statements come from educators interviewed as a part of the [Big Steps - United Workers Union paper titled "Exhausted, Undervalued and Leaving: The crisis in Early Education"](#):

"As a single mother my wage was not enough to support my family. It really limits your choices as a woman. Why would you choose to be part of an underclass?" Educator, NSW

"It's hard to describe the stress we are all under. It's not just our workloads, but the fact that we are trying to care for and educate children. That means something, it's important work. But it's hard to do that to the best of our abilities when we have so much to do all the time. Educators at my centre, we

are stressed and burnt out and not a week goes by when someone wants to throw it all in.” Teacher, WA

“You feel so guilty when you genuinely are sick and can’t come in, and you know that there will be difficulties in replacing you. You dread answering the phone at certain times because it might be a staff member calling in sick and you don’t know how you’re going to cover them. You feel awful for having to turn down parents who ring in for an extra session for work or respite, because you can’t find enough staff.” Educator, SA

“Educators at my centre are having to come in earlier, they are missing out their programming time, rushing through their breaks, and they are staying back after hours longer just to be able to cover shifts and ratios. Educator burnout is a real problem in this sector.” Director, NSW

“Educators’ sense of well-being is suffering, they feel like they can’t have a day off and, in reality, they can’t because we don’t have anyone to replace them. It’s come to the point where it’s about having a “bum” on a seat compared rather than providing high quality education and care.” Assistant Director, VIC

“Every day I wake up worrying about how many educators have called in sick today that we cannot replace. There is constant stress about how we can even provide a safe environment for children, least of all any quality education and care.” Director, VIC

“With such a high staff turnover you can barely take time off and wind up feeling guilty if for some reason you’ve caught the illness that’s been going around the centre and you have to call in sick. This leads to burn out and people questioning why they are actually working in an industry where people think they are just “babysitters” and don’t appreciate or recognise the hard work, passion and dedication that goes into this job.” Educator, ACT

“As a centre director, it worries me that experienced, qualified staff are constantly leaving the sector for better paid positions. This lack of consistency is not good for children and families, and it is not good for centre morale.” Assistant Director, NSW

“Our service is running at approximately 65% occupancy with a large waiting list as we cannot get staff to fill the roles needed to put these children into care. And because of these shortages, staff are being shuffled around from one room to another, so that there is little consistency of care for the children we do have in attendance.” Teacher, VIC

“The sector is getting worse. We often struggle to meet ratio due to staff shortages. The impact on children is devastating, the younger ones, especially, struggle when they see a new face every day. It is hard to spend quality time with the children, to sit and engage with them, when your workload has doubled.” Educator, VIC

“As a director, fielding phone calls and messages all through the night and weekend of educators calling in sick and not being able to sleep at night because you know you can’t cover the shifts and your manager won’t allow you to use agency staff to meet legal ratios. This results in children being shuffled from room to room like they are pieces of furniture and having to resort to ‘under-the-roof’ which compromises children’s safety and dramatically impacts educator wellbeing and stress levels.” Director, SA

37% of educators don't intend on staying in the sector long term

74% of those are likely to leave within three years, 26% within less than 12 months

97% of respondents stated they were concerned about high turnover within the sector

These statements came from a national survey conducted by the United Workers Union, of which over 3800 educators participated (which was more respondents than in the ACECQA survey of the workforce). Of the 3800 respondents, 456 were from South Australia.

The top three reasons stated for wanting to leave the sector were: excessive workload (73%), low pay (63%) and feeling undervalued (47%). ECEC educators are among the lowest paid workers in the country. According to [Fair Work Ombudsman 2021](#), entry level ECEC workers earn 14% above the national minimum award rate (\$23.31/ hr vs \$20.33). 66% of those surveyed indicated feeling under pressure not to take leave because of staff shortages, 60% said they have worked while sick due to staff shortages, and 71% of service Directors stated that there has been significant turnover since the beginning of the pandemic (81% also said they had difficulty in recruiting staff). 50% of survey respondents said they would not recommend the ECEC sector as a career.

Since the year 2000, the proportion of children aged 0-5 enrolling into ECEC services has increased by 15% (*Australian Government 2021, 'Early Childhood (pre-primary school) Teachers', Job Outlook, <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/early-childhood-preprimary-school-teachers?occupationCode=2411>*). This age group doesn't directly impact in an OSHC setting, but with more educators required in LDC settings, there are less staff to then take on positions in OSHC. The ECEC sector is likely to [require an additional 39,000 educators by 2023](#) – a 20% increase for the workforce in a sector where approved qualifications are seeing declining enrolment numbers.

How can we try to address this problem, in the short, medium and long term?

Happy Haven is already trying to implement a number of strategies mentioned above:

- Recruitment as a primary focus for People & Culture
- Training our own Diploma Qualified Educators
- Use of Waivers as necessary to operate with less Qualified Educators than is required by ratio and National Regulations
- Continue to use Regional Directors and Administrative staff on the floor, taking away from their ability to effectively manage their other responsibilities in the running of the organisation

We have also tried to apply to ACECQA (without success) for individuals holding non-approved qualifications to be able to be recognised as Qualified. In one such example, the applicant held both a bachelor's degree in Psychological Science, a Cert IV in Youth Work, and had five years' experience working with children. This application was not accepted, and this person is now studying towards their Diploma with us.

Further to this, I believe the following to be important:

- Open up the ACECQA Approved Qualifications List to acknowledge more degrees, diplomas etc. as Qualified in South Australia
- In the long term, having a national approach to Qualification approvals rather than a state-based approach
- In this national approach, place greater emphasis on the requirement to demonstrate previous experience working with children prior to being recognised as Qualified
- Change the ratio requirements for OSHC – 1 educator for every 15 children; 1 Diploma (or equivalent) educator for every first grouping of 30 children; 1 Certificate III (or equivalent) educator for every second grouping of 30 children (i.e. 60 children in care requires 1 Diploma trained educator, 1 Cert III trained educator, and an additional 2 unqualified educators. To go from 60 children to 61 children, an additional Diploma trained educator would be required).
- Unlikely, but the recognition of the benefit of working in an OSHC service while studying towards teaching. This could involve having placement hours within an OSHC to complement teaching placements, greater promotion as a job opportunity by universities, more flexible arrangements from universities to allow for teaching students to work in OSHC while on placement if they wish to do so, inclusion of the National Quality Framework as a study topic within the degree.

As a South Australian company, we are passionate about skilling this State to provide a sustainable workforce, which provides fun, educational care to children. A healthy OSHC system supports the South Australian economy, by allowing families and caregivers to go to work or study, knowing their children are being cared for by professionally trained educators.

For those who want to learn more, I have provided additional references for your convenience.



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Further information

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/early-childhood-education/working-in-early-childhood-education/media/documents/Workforce-Literature-Review.pdf>

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/minimum-wages#:~:text=As%20of%201%20July%202021,in%20their%20award%20or%20agreement.>

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/ProgressingNationalApproachChildrensEducationCareWorkforce.pdf>

<https://bigsteps.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Exhausted-undervalued-and-leaving.pdf>

<https://fb.watch/btJwYMb1X/>

<https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Outcomes-Framework-Final-2019-10-11.pdf>

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf>

<https://www.dese.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>

<https://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/detailedresults.html>

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