



Early Childhood Flexibility Practices and Patterns

LONG DAY CARE Survey Report

2014



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children



About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been a voice for young children since 1938. We are the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood field. ECA advocates to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Executive summary	3
3. Methodology	6
4. Sessions and enrolment	7
Sessions.....	7
Changes to enrolment.....	7
5. Location of services	9
Co-location.....	9
Other kinds of assistance.....	9
6. Opening hours.....	11
7. Working in combination with other services.....	13
8. Meeting the needs of families	15
Consulting with families	15
Utilisation of flexible services	15
Parent cohorts using flexible services.....	16
9. Attributes of flexible early childhood services.....	18
10. The impact of flexible early childhood practices on costs and fees	19
11. Barriers to flexible practice.....	21
Barriers forcing flexible services to be discontinued	22
12. Implementing flexible services in the future	24
13. Self-reflections on flexibility.....	26
14. Summary of findings.....	27



1. Introduction

In 2013, the Commonwealth Government announced Child Care Flexibility Trials, 'a series of flexible and innovative projects which aim to enhance the capacity of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector and better meet the needs of Australian families'.¹

The trials were testing specific models of ECEC however the extent of existing flexible practice across the sector was not widely known. Data about services who offer flexibility is limited, however many services claimed that they provided:

- flexible sessions and enrolment
- flexible location of care or delivery of care
- flexible opening hours
- working in combination with other services.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) proposed to examine the extent of existing flexible practice across the early childhood sector and was funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Child Care Flexibility Fund to:

- identify innovative practices in early childhood service delivery that are already providing, or have the potential to provide increased flexibility of care arrangements to families with young children
- highlight how exemplar services operate and function
- analyse factors contributing to and barriers restricting operators being able to increase flexibility through the analysis of community settings, financial structures and staffing arrangements.

A series of surveys were developed to examine the extent of flexible practice across the early childhood sector. This report provides the analysis of survey results for long day care services only. An expert reference group provided input and advice on the survey development and the analysis of results.

The needs of parents and the role of early childhood services in delivering flexible ECEC to meet these needs are closely linked. ECA's flexibility project focuses on services offering flexible ECEC. The Australian Institute for Family Studies is conducting research with parents about their flexible early learning needs.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or officers of the Department of Education.

¹ Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Flexibility Trials. Retrieved 20 June 2014, from <http://www.education.gov.au/child-care-flexibility-trials>



2. Executive summary

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) conducted a sector wide survey of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in January and February 2014 to identify the range of flexible practices being implemented by early childhood services. Services were also asked about the barriers to flexible practice and whether they would consider making their services more flexible for families in the future.

The findings of the survey will inform a new report by ECA to be published later in the year with recommendations about improving flexible practice to inform governments and the early childhood sector.

Long day care centres are the most common ECEC services accessed by families. ECA received 405 responses to the survey, or around 6.4 per cent of all long day care services. These services responded to the survey on behalf of long day care services though many are licensed to deliver other early childhood services.

This sample was broadly consistent with the distribution of long day care services across Australia with most respondents in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Some self-selection bias can be expected in the results from services delivering flexible models.

Up-front findings from the survey suggest that flexibility includes:

- flexible sessions and enrolment
- the location of services
- flexible opening hours
- working in combination with other services.

Sessions and enrolment

Consistent with approval requirements, most long day care services surveyed (51.5 per cent) currently offered long sessions of at least eight hours in a day. Alternative sessions including shorter sessions such as half days, were also offered by some services, which may reduce costs for families. Over three quarters of the respondents surveyed also allowed families to change the number of days in care and book additional sessions at short notice. A large number of respondents said that they were constrained in their ability to offer flexible sessions due to high occupancy levels.

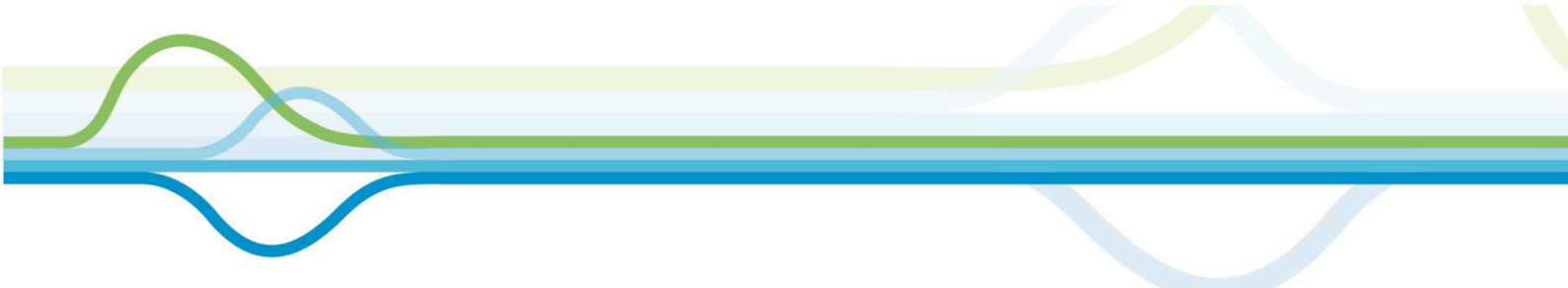
Location of services

'A large majority (69.5 per cent) of long day care services surveyed were not co-located with workplaces, schools or other services.'

Only 11.5 per cent of long day care services were co-located with schools, helping families to avoid 'the double drop off and pick up' of siblings. On-site ECEC in the workplace was only delivered by a small fraction (3.9 per cent) of long day care services surveyed, suggesting that there are complex issues in delivering this model of care which need to be examined further.

Opening hours

Most long day care services were open beyond traditional working hours (9.00 am-5.00 pm). Of the respondents, 68.2 per cent opened from 6.30 am to 7.30 am, which is a much earlier opening time than anticipated and 49 per cent of services closed at 6.00 pm, just beyond traditional working hours. Less than 1 per cent of long day care services surveyed offered extended hours of care beyond 6.30 pm, even though some families have may not have finished work or may be commuting during these periods.



'The most common opening and closing times for long day care services were 6.30 am and 6.00 pm.'

Only around 9 per cent of long day care services surveyed were open on the weekend, catering for retail employees and other industries.

Working in combination with other services

Long day care services surveyed often worked in combination with other services to meet families' needs:

- Of long day care services surveyed, 35.8 per cent worked with child protection services and agencies, reflecting the important early intervention role of early childhood services.
- Long day care services surveyed often worked closely with other types of centre-based early childhood services to provide placements and bridge any gaps in care arrangements.
- Disability and health services were common partners in around one-fifth of long day care services surveyed.

Meeting the needs of families

Only one quarter of long day care services surveyed consulted with families regarding the implementation of flexible practices, demonstrating an opportunity for services to do more to consider the views of families to improve flexibility. Of those that did consult with families, 38 per cent held discussions directly with the families and 29.4 per cent of services surveyed families.

Of the services surveyed, 96 per cent reported that families used flexible services, though of these services, only 46.3 per cent reported that these were used often. Services looking to implement flexible practices may have to consider whether the model can be successfully delivered or adapted if families only use it sometimes.

'Of long day care services, 29 per cent reported that parents with changing work hours took up flexible services, greater than any other parent group.'

Shift workers took up flexible services in 22 per cent of services. Parents working long hours only took up flexible arrangements in 18.9 per cent of services, suggesting that there is less need for flexible services for these families.

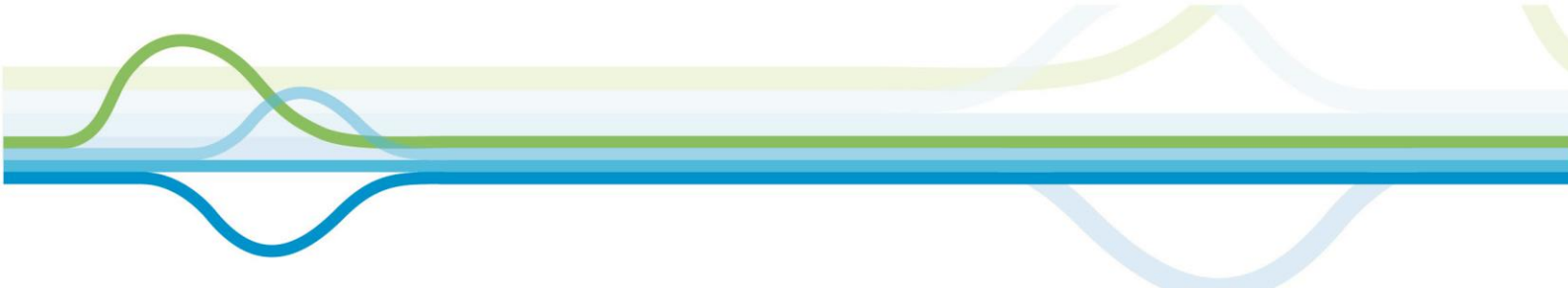
Attributes of flexible early childhood services

One-third of long day care services reported that the greatest attribute enabling flexible practice was the stability of client families attending the service on a consistent basis. Flexible early childhood programming was also listed as an attribute by 26.8 per cent of respondents, enabling services to balance children's developmental needs with the broader needs of the family.

The impact of flexible services on costs and fees

In terms of the cost impact, 16.3 per cent of long day care services indicated that there was no impact from implementing flexible services. Respondents with cost impacts were more likely to build these costs into their service delivery, with 15.2 per cent of services indicating they took this approach. Of respondents, 5 per cent of services increased fees for all parents or parents participating in the flexible service. There is a complex relationship between the type of flexible service offered and the impact on costs and fees for parents, and further analysis of the cost/fee impact is required on an individual provider basis.

Barriers to flexible practice



Just over half (56.3 per cent) of the long day care services encountered barriers in implementing flexible practice, which in some cases led to these services being discontinued.

‘Wage costs and workforce issues were considered to be the greatest barriers to flexible practice.’

Only a small number of respondents (12.6 per cent) identified the National Quality Framework and the Education and Care Services National law and Regulations as significant barriers to flexible practice, suggesting that any future reform to support flexible practice should focus on other barriers.

Implementing flexible practices in the future

There was general support from long day care services for flexible practices, with 35.3 per cent of long day care services supporting the implementation of flexible practices in the future. Only 8.3 per cent of respondents were not supportive. Of long day care services considering the implementation of flexible practice in the future, 40.2 per cent would work with other early childhood services, 39.8 per cent would support more flexible sessions of care, and 35.3 per cent supported the introduction of extended opening times. Of long day care services, 49.6 per cent would target flexible services to parents with changing work hours, with 47.7 per cent choosing parents working long hours and shift workers.

Self-reflections on flexibility

Long day care services rated themselves an average of 5.5 out of 10 for flexibility, lower than other service types, with the exception of kindergartens and preschools.

‘Overall, long day care services rated themselves poorly on flexibility in comparison to other service types.’

While most long day care services rated themselves poorly, 30 per cent of services rated themselves highly in providing flexible services, indicating room for improvement in other services. The practices put in place by this group warrants further examination.

3. Methodology

Early Childhood Australia conducted a sector-wide survey of early childhood education and care services in January and February 2014 to identify the range of flexible practices being implemented by early childhood services to meet the needs of families.

Five surveys were conducted:

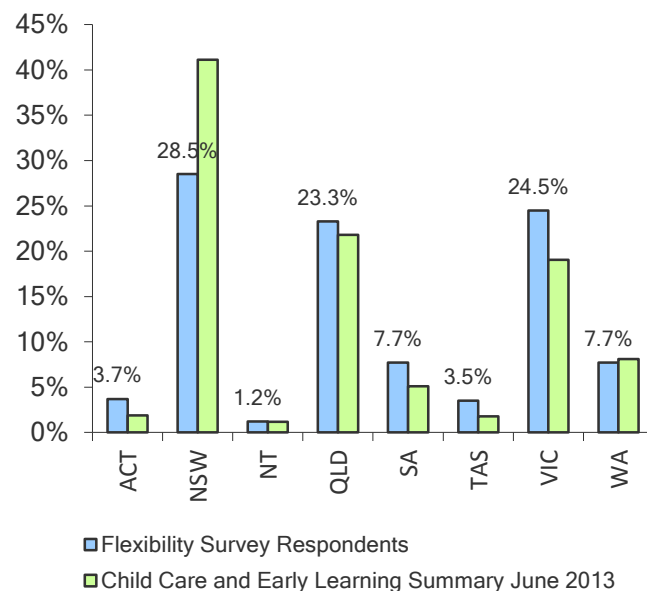
- long day care and other services
- outside school hours care
- family day care services
- family day care educators
- in-home care.

All approved long day care services were invited to participate in the Flexibility Survey. Across Australia, 405 long day care services completed the survey, or around 6.4 per cent of approved long day care services.

The sample of long day care (LDC) services responding to the survey was broadly consistent with the general distribution of long day care services across jurisdictions.

There were, however, some inconsistencies in the distribution of long day care services in the sample compared with the distribution of services across states and territories reported in Child Care and Early Learning in Summary June Quarter 2013 (Department of Education, 2014, p. 7). NSW was under-represented (-12.64 per cent difference) and Victoria was over-represented (+5.44 per cent difference).

Figure 3.4: Distribution of long day care services by jurisdiction



Estimates derived from the survey approach are based on data from a sample of providers. Therefore, the conclusions that can be drawn from the aggregate results are limited by the quality and representativeness of the sample data.

The survey was distributed to all long day care services. Self-selection bias can be expected by services completing the survey that have an interest in flexible practice. Therefore, survey data does not allow for a precise quantification of the level of flexibility in place in services across the sector or as a proportion of all service provision.

The focus of the approach is to identify where services are implementing flexible practice, what practices have been used, and to gauge the interest of services in adopting flexible practice into the future.

4. Sessions and enrolment

Sessions

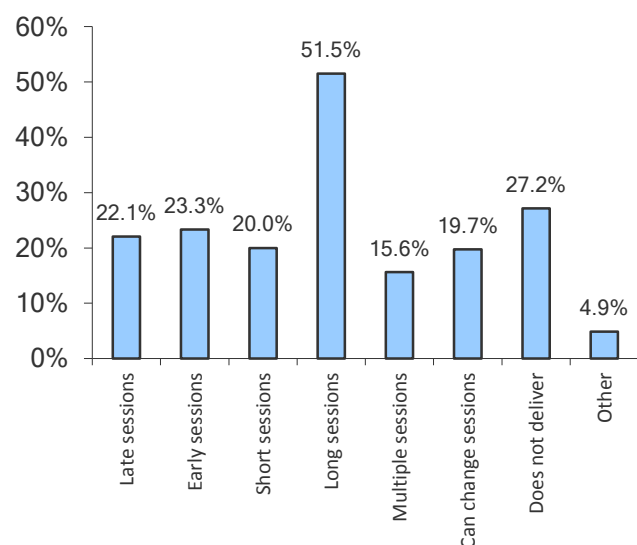
Long day care services are currently required to be open for at least eight continuous hours on each normal working day on which they operate.² Where a child attends a session of care, services cannot prevent the child from attending any part of that session.³

A session of long day care must not exceed 12 hours.⁴ If approved to operate more than 12 hours, a long day care service must put in place multiple sessions with neither exceeding 12 hours.

Sessions may be provided at different times of the day for differing periods, including early, late, short, long and multiple sessions.

Long day care services were asked whether they currently deliver, or have previously delivered, flexible sessions of care. A session of care is the minimum continuous period of time in which early childhood education and care is provided.

Figure 4.1: Long day care services flexible sessions



There may be some subjectivity in whether services considered that the sessions they offered fit within the above categories.

A majority (51.5 per cent) of long day care services responding to the survey offered long sessions of at least eight continuous hours. This is not surprising given that all services must provide sessions for at least eight hours on a normal working day. Although some services indicated that they did not consider an eight hour day to be a 'long session'.

Some long day care services reported that families had the flexibility of using less hours, but still had to pay the session of care.

'We open from 8.00 am - 6.00 pm. Families can come and go at any time in this period.'
– Nominated Supervisor, regional SA

One-fifth of long day care services offered early, late or short sessions. Half day sessions were also used. Some services suggested that this reduced costs for families as families did not have to pay for hours they were not using.

'We currently offer 8.00 am–1.00 pm, or 1.00 pm–6.00 pm sessions. We also offer 8.00 am–6.00 pm and until recently we offered hourly bookings. We now only offer hourly bookings around preschool times and during orientation.'
– Director, regional SA

Changes to enrolment

Changes to enrolment in long day care sessions is another key area of flexibility for families.

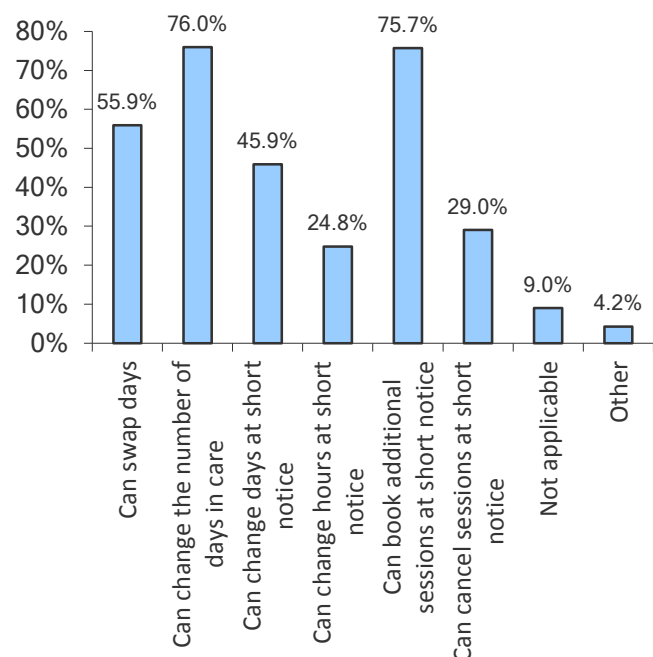
Long day care services showed a high degree of flexibility in relation to enrolment changes. Of respondents, 76 per cent allowed families to change the number of days in care and 75.7 per cent allowed families to book additional sessions at short notice.

² Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Service Handbook 2013–2014. p. 24.

³ Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Service Handbook 2013–2014. Ibid, p. 25.

⁴ Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Service Handbook 2013–2014. Ibid, p. 73.

Figure 4.2: Flexibility of enrolment patterns in long day care



Services indicated that other changes were more difficult at short notice. Only 24.8 per cent of services allowed families to change hours at short notice. 29 per cent of services allowed families to cancel at short notice, with 45.9 per cent of respondents able to change days at short notice. Responses suggested that flexibility of enrolment in relation to cancellation and changes to hours can be complex to manage at short notice due to staffing implications or high occupancy levels.

Some long day care services commented that a defined period of notice had to be given in relation to make changes or cancel sessions. The notice period varied across services from seven days to two weeks', though some services took into account the need for emergency changes.

'Parents are encouraged to give two weeks' notice but to be family friendly each case is taken on its merits'

- Nominated Supervisor,
metropolitan NSW

A high number of services commented that their flexibility in relation to enrolment patterns was heavily dependent on the occupancy of their service.

"Parents can swap days if they are available. If not they have to wait [until] the day they need becomes available."

- Director, metropolitan Qld

This suggests that services with vacancies have greater capacity to offer flexibility in relation to enrolment.

Findings

4.1: Consistent with Family Assistance Law minimum operating requirements, most long day care services reported offering long sessions.

4.2: Alternatives to full day sessions were offered by one-fifth of long day care services surveyed, including shorter sessions such as half days, which some services suggested reduced costs for families using less hours.

4.3: Over three quarters of long day care services surveyed allowed families to change the number of days in care and book additional sessions at short notice. Services were much less likely to be flexible in relation to changes to days or hours at short notice, or cancellation at short notice, due to staffing difficulties.

4.4: Links between high occupation rates and inability to provide flexible enrolment was apparent from the comments of the respondents.

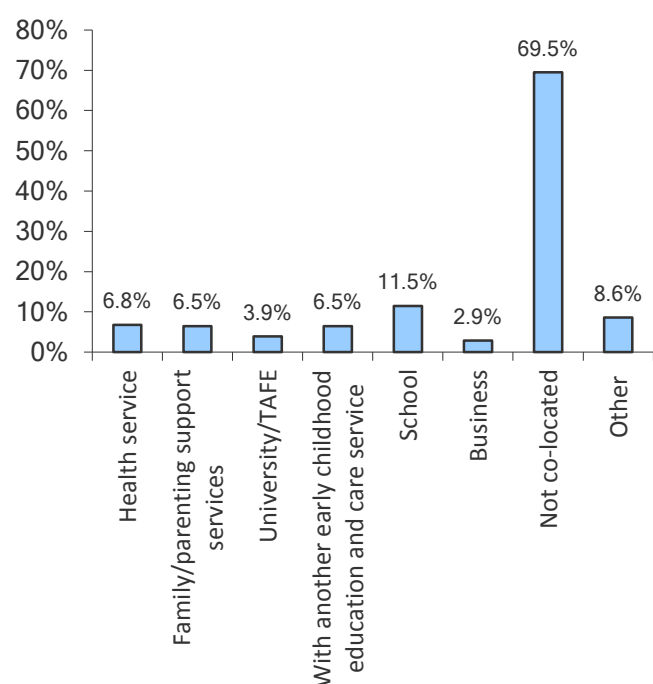
5. Location of services

Location of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is an important aspect of flexibility for families. Flexible location may mean co-location with services used by the family or it could mean other kinds of assistance with the location of the service such as help with transport or mobile delivery of early childhood services.

Co-location

When asked about co-location and flexible location, long day care respondents were mostly not located with another service or organisation (69.5 per cent).

Figure 5.1: Long day care services and co-location



Co-location with other educational institutions enables parents to drop off older siblings at the same time, avoiding the need for a 'double drop off' and 'double pick up' in the morning and afternoon. Despite these efficiencies for parents, only 11.5 per cent of long day care services surveyed were co-located with schools and 6.5 per cent were co-located with other types of early childhood services, such as kindergartens and outside school hours care.

Co-locating family support or health services also provides convenience of access to families and enables a 'soft entry' to these services, particularly for families who are not engaged in the service system. From the survey, 6.5 per cent of long day care services were co-located with family support services and 6.8 per cent with health services.

'We are located in a Community Hub [with] a Medical Centre and Maternal Child Health Centre.'

- Director, regional Vic.

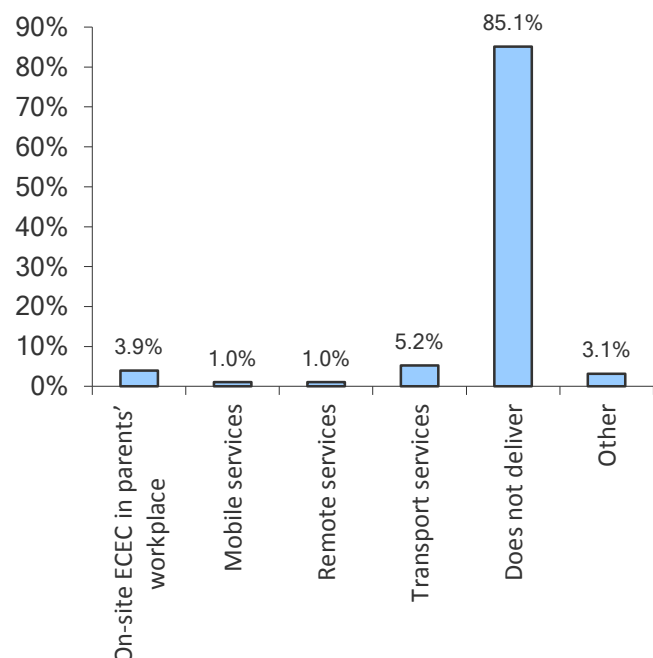
The provision of centre-based ECEC services in or near the workplace is often considered to be flexible for families, particularly in removing the need to travel a distance from work to access ECEC services and enabling the parent to have contact with the child in work hours, however, only 3.9 per cent of long day care services provided on-site ECEC, with 2.9 per cent located next to businesses. This may suggest complexities in establishing centre-based services.

The small number of long day care services co-located with schools and other services provides cause for further consideration of potential barriers to establishing these services, and the planning and development of facilities.

Other kinds of assistance

Only a small number of long day care services delivered services to a flexible location, with 85.1 per cent not delivering ECEC to a flexible location, including transport, remote and mobile services as well as on-site care.

Figure 5.2: Long day care and the delivery of services to a flexible location



Transport services can remove the need for parents to take time out to facilitate the transition of children between other early childhood services such as kindergarten and/or between long day care and the home. Of respondents, 5.2 per cent of long day care services provided transport services.

'We pick up and drop off children for families that don't have transport.'

- Administrator, regional Tas.

Most 'mobile services' are not considered to be long day care services as they are funded from the Commonwealth's Budget Based Funded (BBF) programme. Therefore, only one per cent of long day care services surveyed reported the delivery of mobile services.

Findings

5.1: Of respondents, 69.5 per cent of long day care services were not co-located with any other service and 85.12 per cent did not deliver ECEC to a flexible location.

5.2: Of respondents, 11.5 per cent of long day care services were co-located with schools helping families to avoid 'the 'double drop off and pick up' and 6.5 per cent of services were co-located with another ECEC service.

5.3: Transport services were delivered by 5.2 per cent of services, most commonly between long day care and home and school/preschool.

5.4: On-site ECEC in parents' workplaces was only delivered by 3.9 per cent of long day care services. Barriers to on-site ECEC needs to be examined further.

6. Opening hours

The alignment of opening hours with the needs of families is a significant part of addressing early childhood flexibility.

Long day care services are often perceived as less flexible in terms of their operating hours compared with other services. All approved long day care services must open for at least eight continuous hours on each normal working day on which they operate.⁵

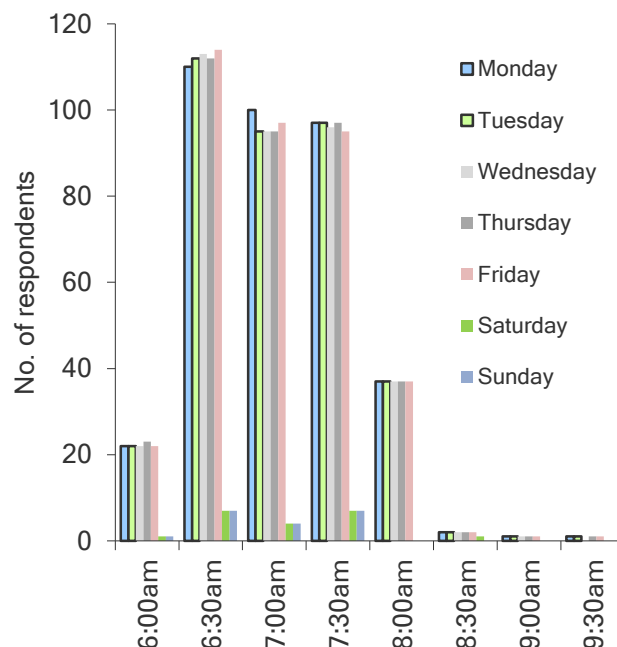
While the maximum length of long day care sessions is 12 hours, services can be approved to operate for more than 12 hours by offering multiple sessions.⁶ This enables providers a level of flexibility to open earlier and close later.

Long day care services can also be approved to offer up to 14 periods of 24-hour care each year. For services, 24-hour care is considered to be a period of continuous 24-hour care of a child where the child does not return to the care and supervision of the parent or guardian.⁷

State, territory and local government regulations may also apply, restricting opening hours.

Long day care services were asked what their opening and closing times were to the nearest half an hour. Some services open or close on the quarter hour or three quarters of an hour so the results will show some statistical error by up to half an hour.

Figure 6.1: Long day care opening times



Long day care services open at a variety of times. A significant majority (68.2 per cent) of long day care services opened from 6.30 am to 7.30 am.

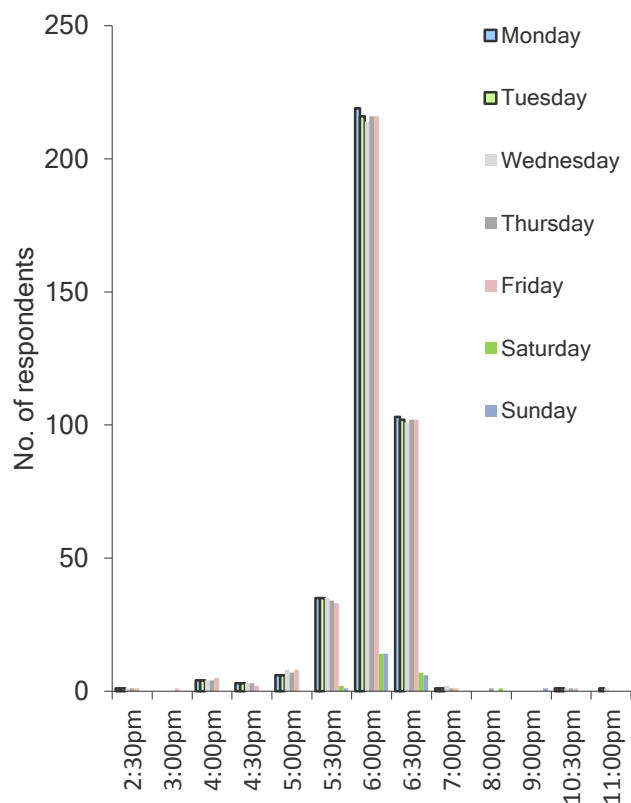
The largest group, or 25.2 per cent of long day care services surveyed, opened at 6.30 am, well before common working hours.

⁵ Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Service Handbook 2013–2014. p. 24.

⁶ Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Service Handbook 2013–2014, p. 73.

⁷ Department of Education. (2014). Child Care Service Handbook 2013–2014, p. 84.

Figure 6.2: Long day care closing times



Closing times among long day care services were more homogenous than opening times. A significant majority (72.0 per cent) of long day care services surveyed closed between 6.00 pm and 6.30 pm.

The largest group of long day care services surveyed, (49 per cent), closed at 6.00 pm, just beyond traditional working hours. This suggests that some services are less flexible in the evening than they are in the morning, potentially making it difficult for some families with later finishing times and/or a long commute from work.

'Our service currently has the following opening and closing times 6.45 am to 6.15 pm.'
- Director, regional Vic.

Closing times beyond 6.30 pm were only offered by 0.8 per cent of services surveyed. No services surveyed closed later than 11.00 pm.

It is surprising that so few services surveyed made use of the capacity to provide multiple sessions to offer extended hours. Feedback suggests that this is primarily because of lack of or variable demand, concern for the

interest of children or the availability and cost of staff to cover these shifts.

Weekend care is often used by families working in the retail and other industries. Around 9 per cent of long day care services were open on the weekend, which was higher than expected. Though, comments from respondents suggest that weekend care had a low occupancy.

A small number of long day care services support extended hours at particular times of the year such as public holidays, or to accommodate seasonal activities. Of long day care services surveyed, 5.1 per cent occasionally offered extended hours throughout the year. The most common arrangement was 'vacation care' during holiday periods or public holidays.

'As part of [our] local government a vacation service is offered during brief closure during Christmas/New Year break.'
- Director, metropolitan NSW

Some long day care services affiliated with universities also offer extended hours, including weekend care in certain periods to cover exam times.

Findings

6.1: The survey results suggest that most long day care services are open beyond traditional working hours, particularly in the morning, with the most common opening and closing times being 6.30 am and 6.00 pm.

6.2: Less than 1 per cent of long day care services surveyed offered extended hours care beyond 6.30 pm, which may not suit families that have either not finished work or may be commuting during these periods.

6.3: Around 9 per cent of long day care services surveyed were open on the weekend.

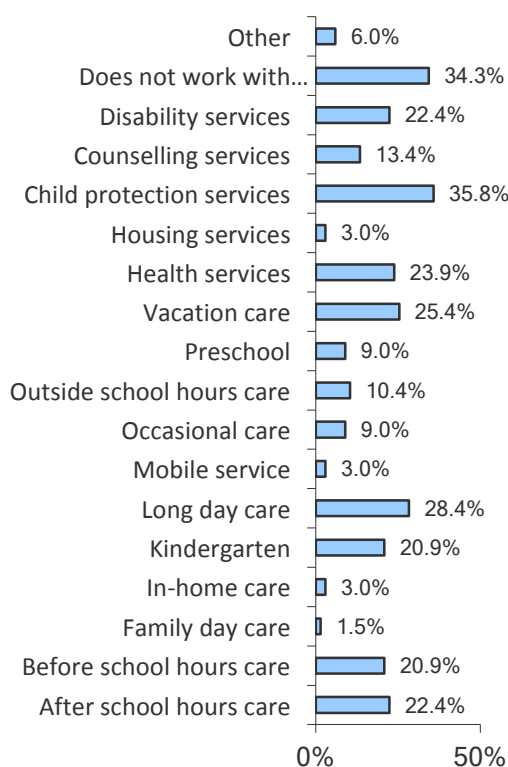
6.4: Only 5.1 per cent of long day care services offered occasional extended hours at particular times of the year, such as public holidays.

7. Working in combination with other services

To meet family needs, early childhood services may work with other services to complement the range of services they offer. This may include providing a range of family support services, or working with other types of early childhood services to bridge gaps in care or learning needs.

Services were asked if they currently work, or have previously worked in combination with other services.

Figure 7.1: Long day care—working in combination with other services



Long day care services reported that they currently worked with a variety of different services.

The largest group of long day care services (35.8 per cent) worked with child protection services. This reflects the important role of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in the protection of young children.

While some services have a minimum commitment as mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect, other long day care services play a more active role with child protection agencies and the out of home care system to assist vulnerable families. These partnerships are aided by Commonwealth subsidies for at-risk children to access low or no cost long day care for short periods, including Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB). Grandparent kinship carers may also access the Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB).

'We have worked together with child services to place children in foster care in our service until such time as they do not need our assistance. We also work with our sister centre to provide care for families who may find days unavailable for care in other centres in the area. We work together to try and find places for them in both systems to find a happy medium for parents.'

- Nominated Supervisor,
metropolitan Qld

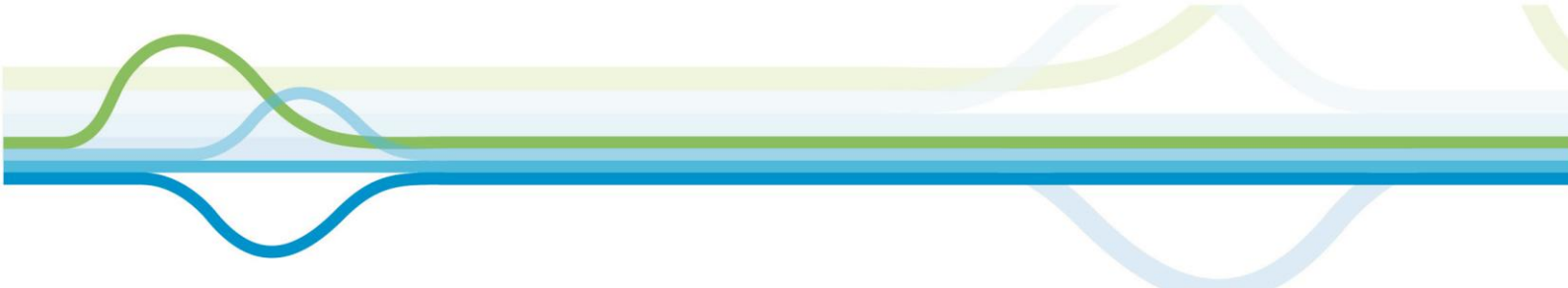
Long day care services also work closely with other early childhood services to meet a range of family needs. Of services surveyed, 28.6 per cent worked with other long day care services, particularly around the placement of children if their needs cannot be met at one service. Some long day care providers were also licensed to deliver other ECEC services.

'[We] used to have an outside school hours care unit within the local school grounds. Now we provide after school care / before school hours care within long day care.'

- Director, metropolitan Qld

Long day care services commonly partner with health and disability services to provide more holistic support for families, and particularly children in early childhood education settings. Health services, including maternal and child health nurses often deliver services through long day care centres, and this has formed a prominent part of many integrated early childhood models such as the Commonwealth funded Child and Family Centre model. Long day care services are able to apply for the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) which may be used to provide support for children with a disability in mainstream settings, often in partnership with disability services.

'[A] health nurse comes to centre once a month for children's checks. Disability services [are] in



constant contact in regards to children with disabilities.'

- Director, regional WA

Findings

7.1: Of long day care services surveyed, 35.8 per cent worked with child protection services and agencies.

7.2: Long day care services surveyed often worked closely with other types of centre-based early childhood services to provide placements and bridge any gaps in care arrangements.

7.3: Disability and health services were common partners in around one-fifth of long day care services surveyed.

8. Meeting the needs of families

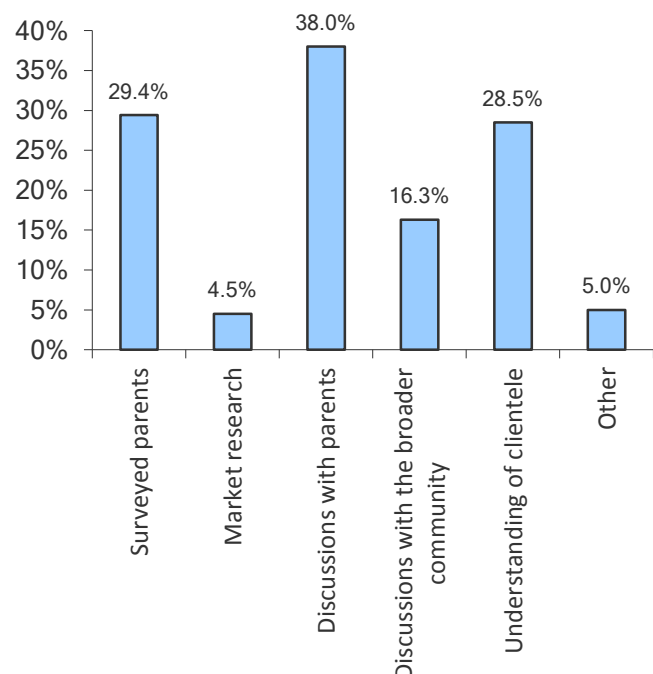
Consulting with families

The needs of families may vary widely depending on the nature and flexibility of work and the flexibility of their family. Understanding what families' needs are is critical to designing and improving flexible services offered in long day care centres.

Services delivering or previously delivering flexible early childhood education and care (ECEC) were asked if they undertook any consultation to better meet the needs of families. Services that did consult with the community were also asked what method of consultation they used.

Only 25.6 per cent of long day services surveyed consulted with parents regarding the implementation of flexible practices.

Figure 8.1: Long day care services currently delivering or previously delivering flexible ECEC—methods of consultation



Of these services that consulted parents, 38 per cent held discussions with parents and 29.4 per cent conducted surveys.

These results demonstrate that there are opportunities for greater consultation with families in service delivery.

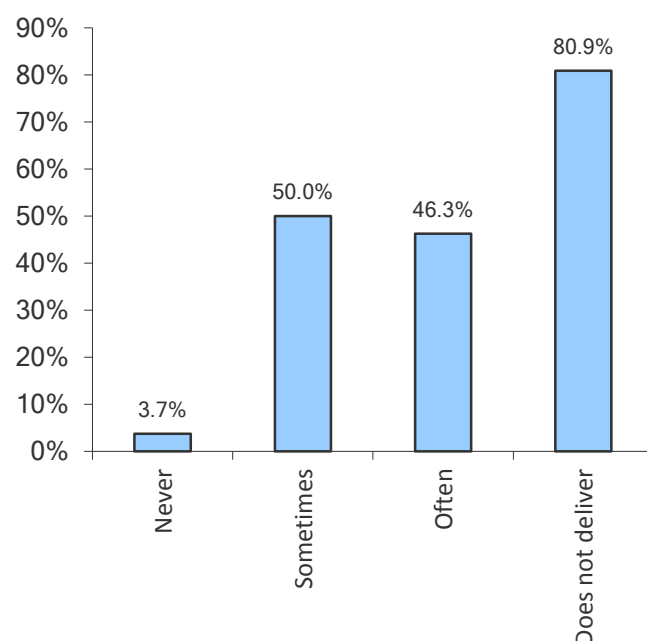
Less structured ways of knowing their families' needs were apparent, with more than a quarter of services (28.5 per cent) saying that they had an understanding of their clientele.

Utilisation of flexible services

While consultation can be useful in developing a greater understanding of the needs of families, an important indicator of actual need is the take-up of these services by families. Without the take-up of flexible services, the service is unlikely to be continued.

When long day care services were asked how often flexible services were being used, 96.3 per cent reported that the flexible services were used.

Figure 8.2: Use of flexible services in long day care



Half reported that the flexible services offered were only used sometimes and 46.3 per cent of long day care services reported that the flexible services were used often.

Only 3.7 per cent of services reported that flexible services were never used. This may suggest that flexible practices were not continued if they were not being used.

These results may suggest that services looking to implement flexible practices may need to consider

whether the model can be successfully delivered or adapted if it is only used by families sometimes.

Parent cohorts using flexible services

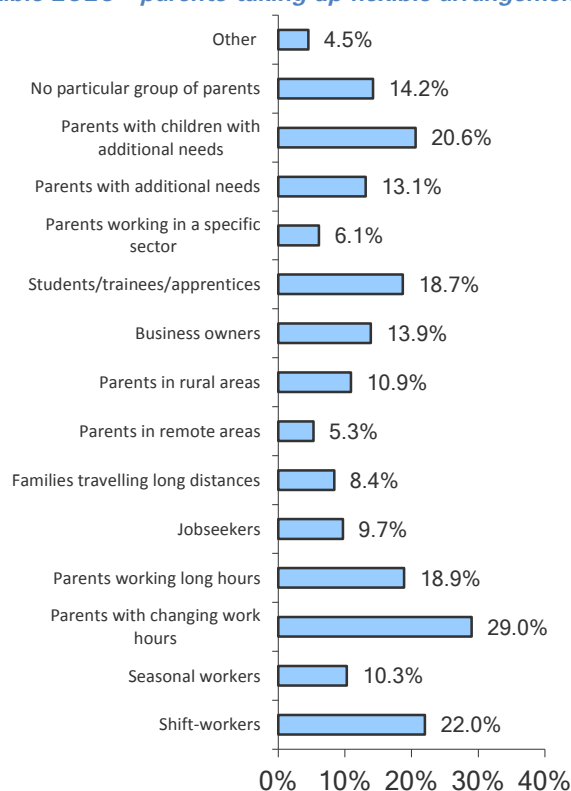
Understanding which parents are taking up flexible arrangements may assist services to improve flexibility for these families.

Services currently delivering or previously delivering any form of flexible ECEC were asked which parents took up the flexible arrangements offered.

Some services may not be aware of the specifics of parents' work arrangements and it is likely that services provided their perception of parent cohorts using services.

The relative take-up rates by different cohorts will vary depending on the incidence of these cohorts in a service's location. It is not expected that urban centres will often report take-up by remote families, for example.

Figure 8.3: Long day care services currently delivering flexible ECEC—parents taking up flexible arrangements



The cohort that was most often reported by services to be taking up flexible arrangements was that of parents with changing work hours (29 per cent). Changing work hours might include any employment with variation in days or hours worked including part-time, casual arrangements, or changes in hours due to overtime or other arrangements.

Shift workers may also be considered to have changing hours. Shift work is characterised by rotating rosters, usually in businesses required to be open 24 hours, seven days per week. Shift workers took up flexible arrangements in 22 per cent of long day care services.

Services may have reported under both categories (shift work and changing hours) because of the likely overlap between these groups.

Parents of children with additional needs took up flexible services in 20.6 per cent of services. It is not possible to determine whether this reflects the population of children with a disability in the community and the adequacy of services provided for these children. Early childhood services have an important early intervention role in supporting children with a disability and may be funded through the inclusion support subsidy to provide support in mainstream early childhood settings.

Significantly, parents working long hours accounted for only 18.4 per cent of parents taking up flexible arrangements. While this may suggest constraints in the opening and closing times of long day care, compared with other service types, it may also reflect the high proportion of parents working part-time and not requiring long hours.

Consultation by services, with families and the community, might reveal reasons for low levels of take-up of particular flexible services.



Findings

8.1: Only a quarter of long day care services consulted with families regarding the implementation of flexible practices, demonstrating a greater opportunity for services to consider the views of families in service delivery.

8.2: Of long day care services that did consult with families, 38 per cent held discussions directly with parents and 29.4 per cent surveyed parents.

8.3: One half of long day care services reported that families only used flexible services sometimes, suggesting that flexible services with high take-up from parents are an exception to the norm. Services looking to implement flexible practices may have to consider whether the model can be successfully delivered or adapted if families only use it sometimes.

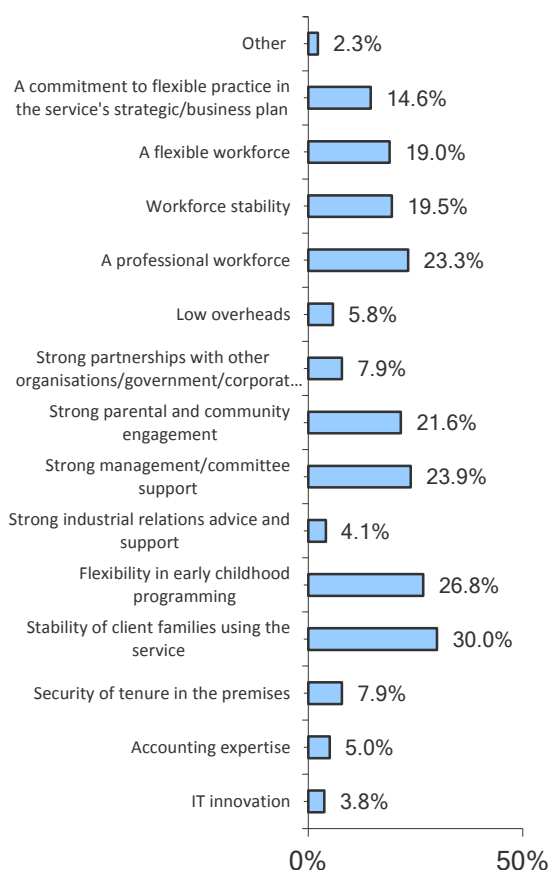
8.4: Of long day care services surveyed, 29 per cent had parents with changing work hours taking up flexible arrangements and 22 per cent were shift workers. In contrast, parents working long hours only took up flexible arrangements in 18.9 per cent of services, suggesting that either long day care is less suitable for these families or that a high proportion of families are working part-time and don't require extended hours care.

9. Attributes of flexible early childhood services

The attributes of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are important in understanding the conditions that support flexible practice. Replicating these conditions may assist other ECEC services to implement flexible practices.

Services currently delivering flexible ECEC were asked what the attributes of their service were which enabled the implementation of flexible practice. They were asked to select from a list of possible options.

Figure 9.1: Long day care services currently delivering or previously delivering flexible ECEC—attributes of the service enabling the implementation of flexible practice



The stability, or the consistency of attendance, of client families was the most significant attribute of flexible long day care services, identified by 30 per cent of survey participants.

The stability of client families can assist services to implement flexible practice. If an early childhood service develops an understanding of the client family's needs, these can be met over a period of time, supported through effective communication.

Flexibility in early childhood programming may also assist the implementation of flexible arrangements for families. The purpose of early childhood education is to provide early learning opportunities for children in a nurturing environment. Flexible practice may challenge the ability of services to deliver developmental activities at certain times, sessions and group settings by consistent educators and teachers who must also be able to observe and guide the child's development. Providing flexible early childhood programming was identified by 26.8 per cent of long day care services as being conducive to flexible practice.

Management and committees/boards manage the affairs of early childhood providers, strongly influencing the nature of services delivered to families, which may include a commitment to, or support of, flexible practice. Strong management or committee support for flexible practices was considered to be an attribute of 23.9 per cent of long day care providers implementing flexible practices.

Findings

9.1: The stability of client families was the most important attribute for 30 per cent of long day care services, enabling them to be more flexible to meet the needs of families by building greater understanding and communication with families.

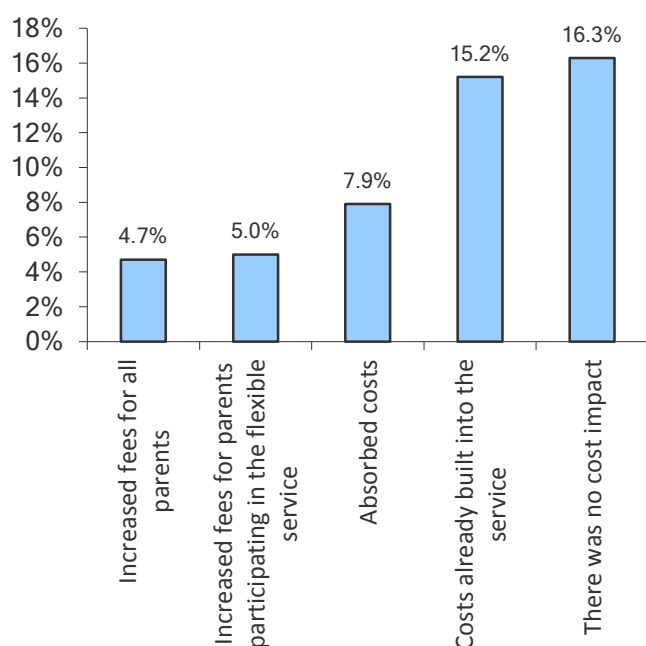
9.2: Flexible early childhood programming also supported flexible practice in 26.8 per cent of long day care services, balancing children's developmental needs with the broader needs of the family.

10. The impact of flexible early childhood practices on costs and fees

The affordability of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is strongly linked to improving flexibility for families. While ECEC may offer services needed by families, if it is not affordable, parents may otherwise remove children from early learning and reduce working hours to meet care responsibilities.⁸

Services were asked if they increased fees as a result of implementing flexible practices.

Figure 10.1: Long day care services currently delivering or previously delivering flexible ECEC—impact on fees



The cost of flexible services varies depending on the model being delivered, however the implementation of flexible practice does not always result in extra costs for families, above the cost of normal service delivery.

Of long day care services surveyed, 16.3 per cent indicated that there was no cost impact on their services from implementing flexible practices and 15.2 per cent

built the costs into service delivery. This may suggest that flexibility is intrinsic to some services.

Only around 5 per cent of services either increased fees for all parents and/or increased fees for parents participating in the flexible service. This may also suggest that flexibility is intrinsic in some services or that services are reluctant to pass the cost of flexible services on to families.

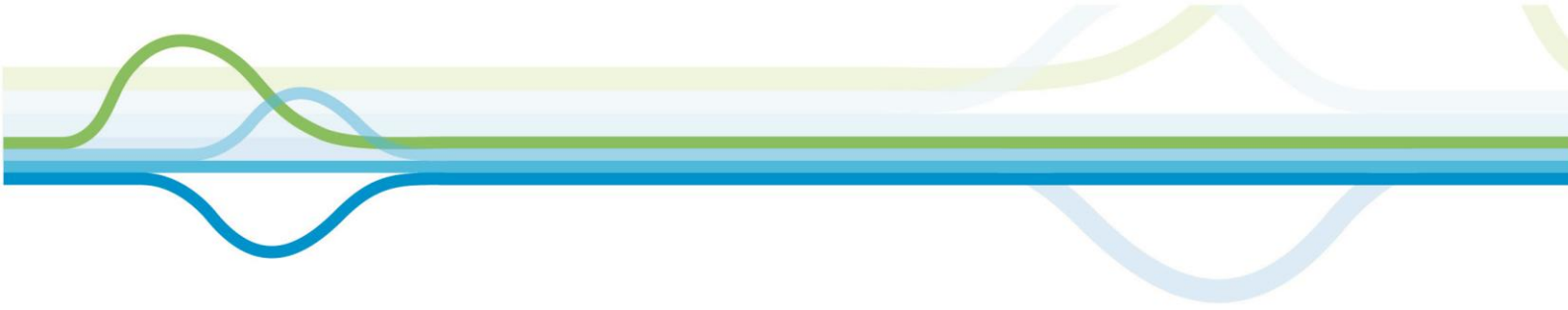
Some services actually saw reduced costs and passed on lower fees to parents as a result of implementing flexible practice.

‘We actually decreased fees when we changed our hours to suit parents’ working hours.’

- Director, metropolitan NSW

Further analysis is required on the relationship between the type of flexible model offered and the cost of delivering the model.

⁸ Emlen, A. (2010). Solving the Childcare and Flexibility Puzzle. Boca-Raton: Universal-Publishers. p. 38.



Findings

10.1: The largest group, or 16.3 per cent of long day care centres indicated there was no cost impact on their services from implementing flexible services.

10.2: Of long day care services with costs from implementing flexible services, 15.2 per cent built these costs into the service delivery and 5 per cent increased fees for all parents or parents participating in the flexible service.

10.3: Due to the complex relationship between the type of flexible service offered and the impact on costs and fees for parents, further analysis of the cost/fee impact is required on an individual provider basis.

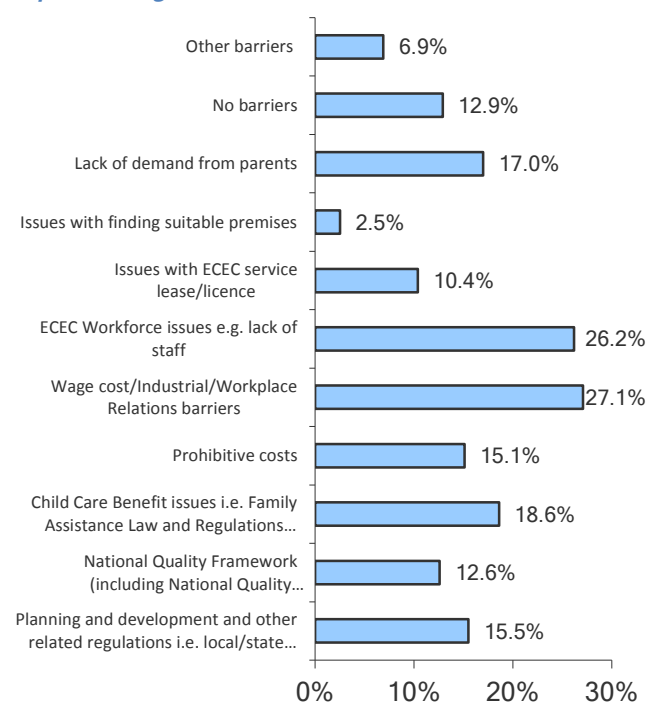
11. Barriers to flexible practice

Feedback from services suggests that implementing flexible services for families can be complex and that there is a range of barriers either preventing or inhibiting the implementation of flexible practice.

Services were asked if they encountered any barriers when implementing flexible practices and were asked to indicate what these were. They were given a list of possible barriers from which they could indicate one or more that applied to them.

Services were also asked about the greatest barrier they encountered in providing more flexible early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Figure 11.1: Barriers for long day care services in implementing flexible ECEC



Of long day care services surveyed, 56.32 per cent encountered barriers when implementing flexible practices.

It was expected that wage costs would be an immediate barrier to the implementation of non-standard or extended hours. The Children's Services Award provides for overtime to be paid at the rate of time and a half for

the first two hours and double time thereafter.⁹ Overtime rates also apply to hours worked on a weekend.

Ordinary hours are worked between 6.00 am and 6.30 pm. While it is possible to classify employees as shift workers to work outside of ordinary hours, overtime rates continue to apply, up to 30 per cent for night shifts. These costs are either absorbed by the service or passed on to families through increased fees.

Of long day care services, 27.1 per cent identified wage costs and industrial issues as barriers to implementing flexible practice. Early childhood workforce issues, such as a lack of staff, was identified by 26.2 per cent of services.

'The additional hours of operation resulted in additional wage costs which were absorbed by the service.'

- Nominated Supervisor,
metropolitan ACT

'If we open later than 6.00 pm we would be required to provide an evening meal which would mean staff, in addition to two staff caring for the children, to cook and clean the premises when children left the premises.'

- Director, metropolitan NSW

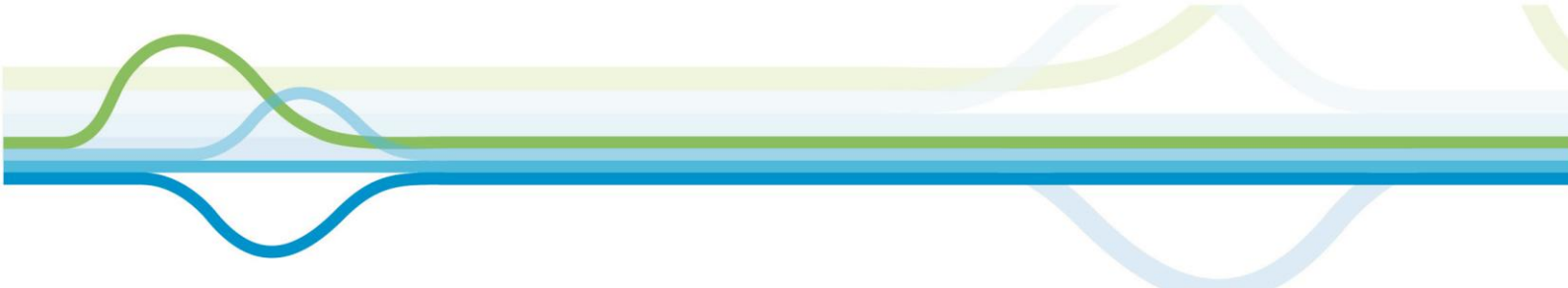
Long day care services reported that educators and teachers were also reluctant or not available to work these hours.

'Most teachers and educators would prefer not to work on the early and late shifts. They all like to work around the 9.00 am to 5.00 pm times. This is more difficult as educators gain qualifications'

- Early Childhood Teacher,
metropolitan NSW

To receive payments from the Commonwealth, all long day care providers must be approved under Family Assistance Law. The Law provides for a range of requirements in relation to the payment of the Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate and other payments. The Family Assistance Law was cited by 18.6 per cent of long day care services as a barrier to implementing flexible practice.

⁹ Children's Services Award 2010, CI 23.2.



Under Family Assistance Law, an individual may be eligible for CCB for more than 50 hours of approved care for work commitments. Services may also be approved to provide non-standard hours sessions. Some services suggested that caps on the number of hours subsidised under Family Assistance Law were a barrier to extending hours.

‘CCB [is] not paid for more than 12 hours a day. This increases the cost for families, especially families working full time.’

- Nominated Supervisor, regional NSW

Further clarification regarding Family Assistance Law and maximum eligible CCB hours would assist services to better understand the flexibility offered through the family payments system.

Lack of or variable demand from families for flexible ECEC is a key barrier stopping the implementation or continued delivery of flexible ECEC services. Of long day care services, 17 per cent reported a lack of demand as a barrier to flexible practice.

‘Staffing needed to be maintained however there was little demand for the afternoons.’

- Nominated Supervisor, metropolitan ACT

‘The cost of employing extra staff for just a couple of extra children. We cannot afford to have extra staff employed in case families need extra days, even though we have the spaces available.’

- Nominated Supervisor, metropolitan NSW

State and local government planning and development regulations vary between jurisdictions, but can impact on the flexibility of services. Zoned residential areas are often subject to specific controls on opening hours, location and the size of centre based services. Of long day care services, 15.5 per cent indicated that planning and development regulations presented a barrier to flexible ECEC.

‘[The] Local Council placed opening hours restrictions on our service because we are in a residential area so we are not even able to open the usual hours for a long day care service let alone be flexible with night or weekend care.’

- Director, metropolitan Vic.

There has been a significant level of focus by governments and regulators regarding the regulatory burden associated with the National Quality Framework for ECEC, including the Education and Care Services National Law. The national regulatory system, including the National Quality Framework was only considered to be a barrier to flexible practice by 12.6 per cent of long day care services surveyed. This suggests that any future reform to assist services to implement more flexible services should focus on other barriers.

Barriers forcing flexible services to be discontinued

While some barriers to flexibility may inhibit the delivery of flexible services to families these may, in some cases, be overcome. At one end of the spectrum these barriers may be considered to be ‘gripes’, however at the other end these barriers may be ‘hard barriers’ which actually force services to discontinue the implementation or delivery of flexible ECEC.

Long day care services previously delivering flexible ECEC were asked why they discontinued these services to help identify ‘hard barriers’. The responses broadly reflected the barriers already identified. A lack of demand from parents, costs and administrative burden and staffing difficulties were some of the key reasons why services discontinued flexible services for families.

‘AM and PM sessions were discontinued due to the difficulty in staffing, increased administration and unpredictable numbers of children in each session. Five-hour sessions were discontinued due to lack of need.’

- Director, metropolitan Tas.



Findings

11.1: Of long day care services, 56.32 per cent encountered barriers to implementing flexible practice which, in some cases, led to these services being discontinued.

11.2: Of these barriers, wage costs and workforce issues were considered to be the greatest barriers by around a quarter of long day care services.

11.3: Of long day care services, 18.6 per cent reported that the Family Assistance Law, including the regulation of child care payments, significantly inhibited flexible practices.

11.4: Lack of or variable demand by families for flexible services was identified as a significant barrier to flexible practice by 17 per cent of services, as without demand, any increased wage costs could not be covered.

11.5: Local government planning and development regulations were identified by 15.5 per cent of long day care services as an issue, raising concerns about controls on opening hours, size, location as well as other issues, varying depending on the jurisdiction.

11.6: The National Quality Framework and the Education and Care Services National Law were only identified as a significant barrier to flexible practice by 12.6 per cent of long day care services, suggesting that any future reform to support flexible practice should focus on other barriers.

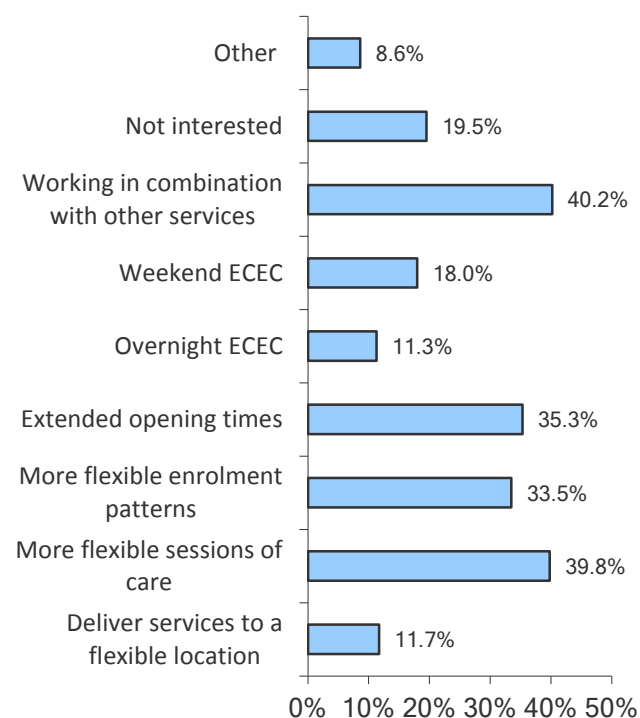
12. Implementing flexible services in the future

While it is useful to examine the range of flexible practices already being implemented, the views of services on flexible practice can help to inform improvements to flexible early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Services were asked if they supported the implementation of more flexible early childhood services for parents in the future.

There was general support for implementing flexible practices within services, with 35.3 per cent of services stating they would support implementing flexible practices and 56.4 per cent stating they may support implementing flexible practice. Only 8.3 per cent said they wouldn't support implementing flexible practices.

Figure 12.1: Long day care services considering implementing flexible practices



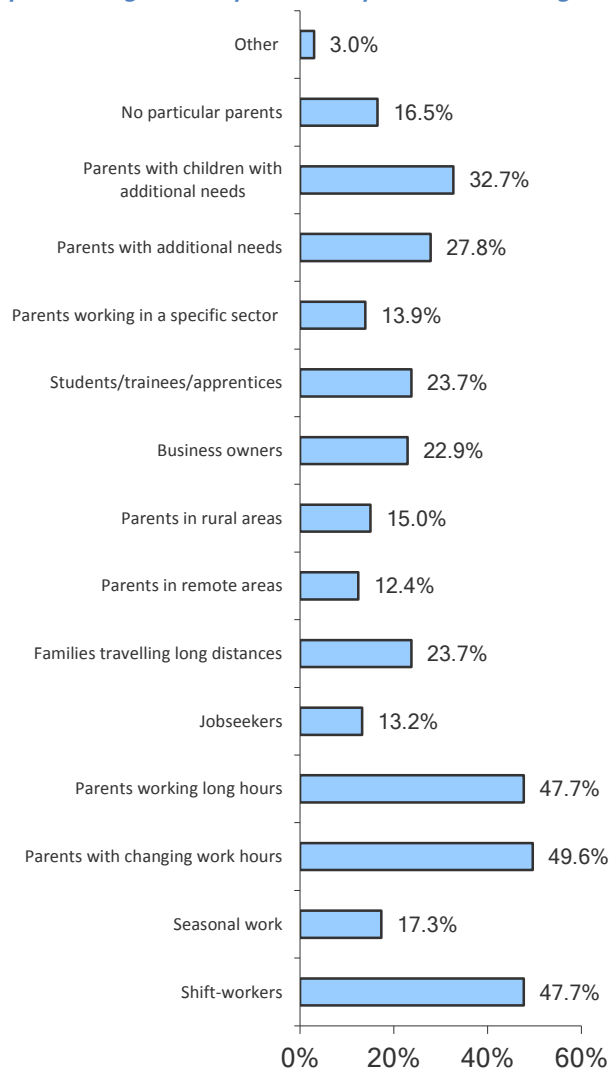
Of long day care services, 40.2 per cent would consider working in combination with other services and 39.8 per cent would consider offering more flexible sessions of care.

Of long day care services, 35.3 per cent would consider extended opening times, though overnight ECEC would only be considered by 11.3 per cent of services.

The focus by services on these areas may provide grounds for greater assistance or information to services wanting to implement these forms of flexible early childhood education in the future if these align with family needs.

Services were asked which families they would target in implementing flexible practices. Of long day care providers, 49.6 per cent would consider targeting parents with changing work hours, with 47.7 per cent focusing on parents working long hours and shift workers.

Figure 12.2: Long day care services considering implementing flexible practices—parents to be targeted





Findings

12.1: There was general support from long day care services of flexible practice, with 35.3 per cent indicating they would support the implementation of flexible early childhood practices in the future, with only 8.3 per cent not supportive.

12.2: Of the long day care services that would consider implementing flexible practices in the future, 40.2 per cent would work in combination with other services, 39.8 per cent would support more flexible sessions of care, and 35.3 per cent would support introducing extended opening times.

12.3: Of long day care services, 49.6 per cent would target flexible services to parents with changing work hours, with 47.7 per cent choosing parents working long hours and shift workers.

13. Self-reflections on flexibility

Self-reflection on the services offered to families can assist in understanding how services think these needs are being met and where improvements can be made. Self-reflection may also provide insight into the nature of the service system and perceived or real constraints that exist.

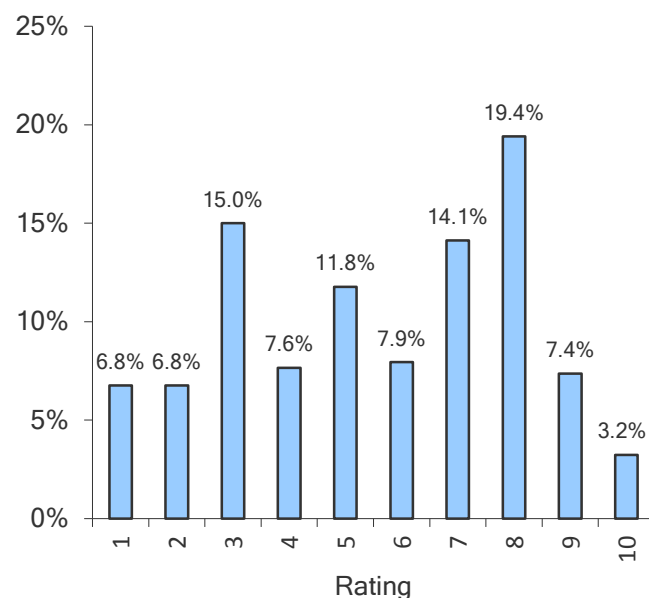
To understand how services view the level of flexibility at their services, survey participants were asked to rate how flexible their service is on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most flexible and 1 being the least).

Long day care services do not perceive themselves to be as flexible as other service types. Long day care services rated themselves in the middle of the range with an average of 5.5, ahead of kindergarten/preschool services who rated themselves the least flexible of all service types. This may suggest that there is substantial room for improvement in flexible services and/or that long day care is constrained in providing flexible services.

The average rating is broadly in line with other findings in relation to the extent and range of flexible services offered, compared with other service types.

The largest group of long day care services (19.4 per cent) rated themselves an 8 suggesting that flexible services can be delivered in long day care settings and that other long day care services can improve flexibility for families.

Figure 13.1: Percentage of services by flexibility rating



Findings

13.1: Long day care services rated themselves poorly in terms of flexibility compared to other service types; an average of 5.5 out of 10. Only kindergartens and preschools had lower ratings.

13.2: The largest group of long day care services (19.4 per cent) rated themselves highly in providing flexible services. This indicates that there is room for other long day care services to improve flexibility for families.

14. Summary of findings

4.1: Consistent with Family Assistance Law minimum operating requirements, most long day care services reported offering long sessions.	8
4.2: Alternatives to full day sessions were offered by one-fifth of long day care services surveyed, including shorter sessions such as half days, which some services suggested reduced costs for families using less hours.	8
4.3: Over three quarters of long day care services surveyed allowed families to change the number of days in care and book additional sessions at short notice. Services were much less likely to be flexible in relation to changes to days or hours at short notice, or cancellation at short notice, due to staffing difficulties.	8
4.4: Links between high occupation rates and inability to provide flexible enrolment was apparent from the comments of the respondents.	8
5.1: Of respondents, 69.5 per cent of long day care services were not co-located with any other service and 85.12 per cent did not deliver ECEC to a flexible location.	10
5.2: Of respondents, 11.5 per cent of long day care services were co-located with schools helping families to avoid 'the double drop off and pick up' and 6.5 per cent of services were co-located with another ECEC service.	10
5.3: Transport services were delivered by 5.2 per cent of services, most commonly between long day care and home and school/preschool.	10
5.4: On-site ECEC in parents' workplaces was only delivered by 3.9 per cent of long day care services. Barriers to on-site ECEC needs to be examined further.	10
6.1: The survey results suggest that most long day care services are open beyond traditional working hours, particularly in the morning, with the most common opening and closing times being 6.30 am and 6.00 pm.	12
6.2: Less than 1 per cent of long day care services surveyed offered extended hours care beyond 6.30 pm, which may not suit families that have either not finished work or may be commuting during these periods.	12
6.3: Around 9 per cent of long day care services surveyed were open on the weekend.	12
6.4: Only 5.1 per cent of long day care services offered occasional extended hours at particular times of the year, such as public holidays.	12
7.1: Of long day care services surveyed, 35.8 per cent worked with child protection services and agencies.	14
7.2: Long day care services surveyed often worked closely with other types of centre-based early childhood services to provide placements and bridge any gaps in care arrangements.	14
7.3: Disability and health services were common partners in around one-fifth of long day care services surveyed.	14
8.1: Only a quarter of long day care services consulted with families regarding the implementation of flexible practices, demonstrating a greater opportunity for services to consider the views of families in service delivery.	17
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