

# **Room to Grow: Policy Options for Developing BC's Early Childhood Education Workforce**

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## Ethics Statement



The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

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## **Abstract**

The recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) is vital to ensuring the provision of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). British Columbia faces chronic challenges of high turnover and workforce shortages in regulated center-based ECEC, with significant negative consequences for children, parents, educators, and BC's population overall. Despite well-known historical problems, little research has investigated recent changes, or attempted to develop comprehensive workforce strategies specific to BC. This study seeks to address this gap, using a mixed methods approach of interview data, survey analysis, literature review, and statistical evidence to highlight causes and assess potential solutions in the current BC context. Evidence is found of recent worsening in BC's early childhood educator workforce challenges. Findings confirm that persistent issues of low pay and poor social recognition remain major problems; highlighted also is a high proportion of small centres, weak workplace and institutional supports, and a recent trend of increased competition for qualified workers from education and health sectors. A set of policy options is systematically analyzed according to a set of criteria, and recommendations are presented.

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## Glossary

<b>Accessibility</b>	In the childcare field, the term refers to the availability of child care when and where a family needs it.
<b>Affordability</b>	The degree to which the price of child care is a feasible family expense.
<b>Continuity of Care.</b>	Provision of care to children by consistent caregivers in consistent locations throughout the day and/or year to ensure a stable and nurturing environment
<b>Developmentally Appropriate</b>	A way of describing practices that are adapted to match the age, characteristics and developmental progress of a specific age group of children.
<b>Early Childhood Educator (ECE)</b>	Used in this study to refer specifically to educators formally registered as Early Childhood Educators with provincial registry (distinguished from ‘educator’)
<b>Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)</b>	Services for children aged 0-5 that include a component of both custodial care and education. Used interchangeably in this study with childcare.
<b>Early Intervention</b>	A range of services designed to enhance the development of children with disabilities or at risk of developmental delay.
<b>Educator</b>	A general term for a paid worker providing educational services to children. In this study, used as a blanket term for both formally qualified and non-qualified workers.
<b>Family Child Care</b>	Childcare provided for a group of children in a home setting.
<b>Preschool</b>	Part-time programs that provide care for children ages 3-5. Normally they operated for three to four hours per day, and from two to five days a week.
<b>Quality child care</b>	Commonly refers to early childhood settings in which children are safe, healthy, and receive appropriately stimulation, although specific understandings vary based on different societal conceptions of children’s development (OECD, 2015).
<b>Retention</b>	The reduction in the turnover of childcare staff.
<b>Social Development</b>	Pattern or process of change exhibited by individuals resulting from their interaction with other individuals, social institutions, social customs, etc.

# **Executive Summary**

## **Policy problem and objectives**

There is a strong consensus among researchers, policy makers and practitioners that high-quality early childhood education and depends on well-educated, qualified, and experienced staff (Urban et al, 2012). Yet, early childhood educators (ECEs) in Canada’s childcare centres consistently experience persistent workforce shortages (Fairholm and Davis 2012), and high turnover rates. These shortages are worst in communities of lower socio-economic status (SES)—a troubling fact, given that research suggests children from these communities would benefit most from high-quality care (Prentice, 2007, White, Prentice and Perlman [WPP], 2015).

The policy problem addressed by this study is that there are too few high-quality educators available to children aged 0-5 in BC’s early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres, and too much turnover amongst those staff that are available. Few recent efforts have tracked recent developments this issue in BC. The objective of this study is to address this gap, diagnose the current situation, and to ultimately produce, systematically analyze a set of practical, effective policy options that BC could implement to address the most pressing issues in BC’s workforce

## **Methodology**

The research conducted for this study is guided by two overarching questions: First, what are the nature and scope recruitment and retention challenges experienced by ECE employers in BC? Second, how can ECEC policies be most effectively used to address these problems? The study begins with an overview of the historical challenges facing the early childhood workforce, followed by a literature review on the subject of quality in childcare, and early childhood educators. An overview is provided of BC’s current policy and regulatory context affecting workers. An original research strategy is applied to assess the current context using stakeholder and expert interviews, analysis of survey results, and an analysis of recent trends using data from a prominent job listings board.

## Results

The key results identified through the research process are that:

- ECEC recruitment and retention has been a problem for decades, but has been getting worse in recent years. Job listings confirm a significant recent spike in demand, particularly for educators with a basic Early Childhood Educator designation
- challenges affect not only disadvantaged areas, but the field as a whole
- Primary causes include wages and benefits, and associated, respect for the profession
- Presence of poor staff preparation and education, especially for assistants but also for some ECEs, itself a source of stress for employees
- Changes in the education system have increased the overall opportunities for ECEs, but have resulted in an even greater drain of talent or qualified workers from the childcare field
- Lack of job clarity, weak career advancement, and poor role clarity are key factors for ECEs
- The high prevalence of small centres in BC contributes to major problems of poor administrative capacity in hiring, supporting and mentoring workers, and workplace stress

## Policy Analysis

I present and evaluate policy options according to a set of criteria, permitting assessment of trade-offs between different strategies. Four options are assessed: 1. wage and benefit incentives, increasing with qualifications, 2. a negotiated wage scale setting a single, higher wage rate for educators across the province, 3. a workplace-based training program, and 4. centres targeted low SES communities, with increased subsidies for low-income parents.

## Recommendation

I recommend the implementation of the option:

- Option 1: Incentives for centres higher levels of qualifications

Introducing incentives directly targets the most crucial elements supporting the development of a high-quality workforce. Workers are rewarded for enhanced

qualifications, contributing to a career path, and benefits and stable pay result in substantially improved retention. Communities and employers retain a high latitude of control over the best use of funds. Because the option is relatively politically feasible and relatively easily implemented, it allows government to immediately begin addressing the most pressing problems.

I conclude by emphasizing the benefits of improving the early childhood education workforce as a flexible policy lever for influencing the quality of early childhood education today, and in the future. It is vital that governments maintain a broad ethical understanding of wellbeing and development in the early years, and for an evolving, open attitude to the role that early childhood educators play in the lives of children, parents, and communities.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Over the past 25 years, a growing body of scientific evidence has underscored the pivotal role of early childhood in neurological development (Currie & Rossin-Slater, 2015). Research on governmental investments into early childhood has reinforced these findings, reporting substantial long-term educational, economic, and health benefits from high-quality early childhood education and care programmes (White, Prentice & Perlman [WPP], 2015). Bolstered by high profile reports from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2001,2006) and UNICEF (2008) reports on the subject, nearly every province in Canada has subsequently increased investments and tightened regulations on early years programs, citing potential benefits to children and economic returns to society (WPP, 2015; Prentice, 2016).

Yet every province in Canada reports ongoing challenges in the factor most consistently tied to high-quality care: the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators (ECEs) with post-secondary qualifications in early childhood development (Fairholm & Davis, 2012). Given the strong association between educator quality and children's outcomes, these persistent deficiencies in the ECE workforce cast doubt on the ability of Canadian childcare systems to produce anticipated benefits.

Simultaneously, demand for childcare in Canada is on the rise, driven by greater prevalence of households with dual-working parents, single parents, and lower average earnings (Kershaw, 2009). The escalating demand for available, affordable childcare risks exacerbating shortages of qualified early childhood educators. Canadian historical evidence shows that in periods of increasing demand for childcare, there is a tendency for quality to suffer, as employers and policymakers hire more unskilled workers, lower standards and loosen regulations (CCHRSC, 2009).

Worsening this situation, the shortage of ECEs is most pronounced in rural and lower socio-economic status neighbourhoods, meaning that children from disadvantaged

backgrounds tend to have access to fewer, lower-quality services (Prentice, 2007). The combination of low recruitment and inequitable availability threatens governmental aspirations of addressing societal inequalities, achieving benefits to children, or generating economic returns to society.

## **1.1. Policy problem definition**

The policy problem addressed by this study is that there are too few high-quality educators available to children aged 0-5 in BC's early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres, and too much turnover amongst those staff that are available. These shortages deprive children of vital educational resources at an especially crucial time in early development, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations.

For the sake of clarity, I use educator throughout this document as a general term referring to staff working with children, regardless of credentials. I use the term Early Childhood Educator (ECEs) when specifically referring to registered educators with college diplomas, and Assistants for educators who have earned that designation. For a breakdown of different credential types in BC, see Table 1 in section 4.3. I also use ECEC and childcare interchangeably to refer to custodial services for children under the age of six, as the use of both is common throughout literature on the subject.

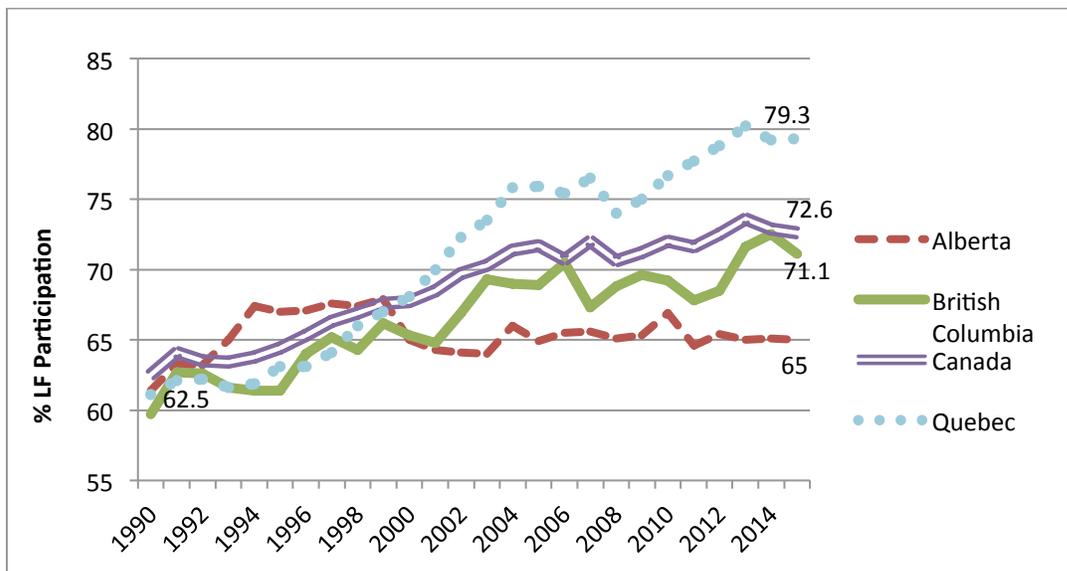
Very little information is tracked on Canada's early childhood workforce, and no recent study has systematically assessed the BC context. This study will undertake an analysis of current workforce development challenges and opportunities for early childhood educators in BC. It will assess literature on the nature and scope of educator recruitment and retention issues in Canada, identify appropriate policy options and assess their applicability to the BC context. The aim is to produce and systematically analyze a set of practical, effective policy options that BC could implement to ensure a sustainable, high-quality early childhood workforce to the benefit of educators, the children in their care, parents, and BC as a whole.

## Chapter 2. Early childhood education in Canada

### 2.1. Growing demand

An increasing number of BC households depend on some form of ECEC to enable them to work. Fig. 1 below compares labour market participation of mothers with children under the age of 6 for each province and Canada from 1990 to 2015. For Canada overall, this figure rises from 62.5% in 1990 to 72.6% in 2015. BC rates slightly below the Canadian average, with 70.4% labour force participation in 2015. The proportion of single-parent households in Canada has also rapidly increased in recent years, from 14% in 1990 to 20% in 2015 (Statistics Canada, Table 282-0211).

**Figure 1. Labour force participation of women with children under age 6 1990-2015**



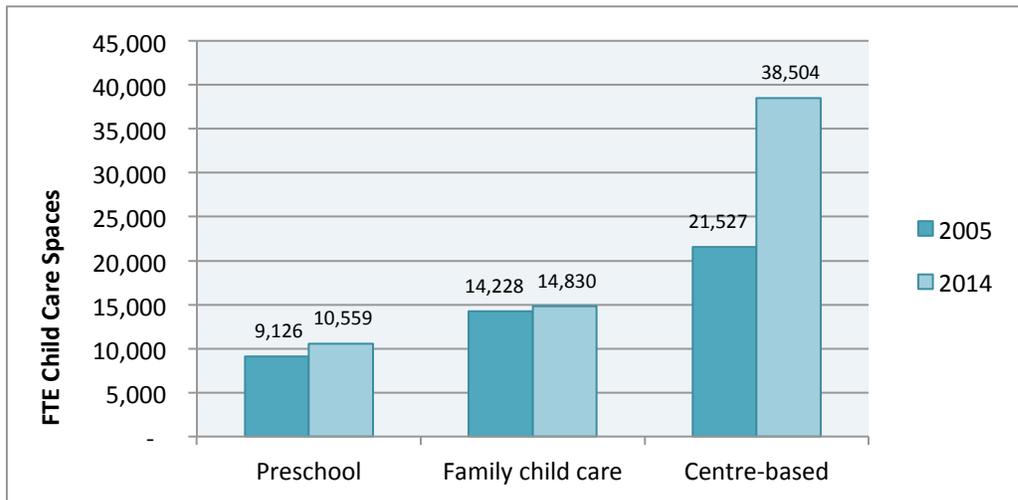
Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 082-0211

At the same time, for many North American parents of young children, increasingly uncertain, lower-paying, and unstable employment increases the need for

ECEC services, even as it decreases their ability to pay for them. For adults under age 35, wages, wealth accumulation, and employment stability have all stagnated or declined over the past 30 years (Fry, Livingston & Taylor, 2011; Kershaw, 2015). Simultaneously, North America has seen a substantial increase in “non-standard work arrangements, cyclical layoffs, self-employment, part-time, multiple and temporary jobs” (Lyons et Al. 2015, p.17). Unstable, low-paid employment has made single-earner households less tenable, and increased the need for stable, flexible out-of-home care options.

In BC, centre-based care, employing professional staff, accounts for the large majority of new childcare spaces. Between 2005 and 2014, the number of full time equivalent (FTE) childcare spaces for young children increased by 42%, from 44,881 to 63,893<sup>1</sup>, while centre-based care nearly doubled over this period. Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of this increase by preschool, family care, and centre-based care.

**Figure 2. BC childcare by provider type – 2005/2014**



Source: Friendly et al 2007 & Friendly et al 2015

<sup>1</sup> FTE estimates are obtained by counting each part-time space as 0.5 FTE spaces. Figures obtained from Childcare Research and Resource Unit’s reports on childcare in Canada, and exclude school-aged care. Family care may include some school aged care.

These changes all suggest a rapidly growing need for qualified, full-time workers. Simultaneously, more is being demanded of ECEC than ever before: governments and parents expect that ECEC will not only provide support for parents, but will provide educational benefits enabling the positive development of children (OECD, 2011). Strategic responses from government are needed to ensure that these competing prerogatives are balanced, and quality is maintained during this rapid expansion of new ECEC.

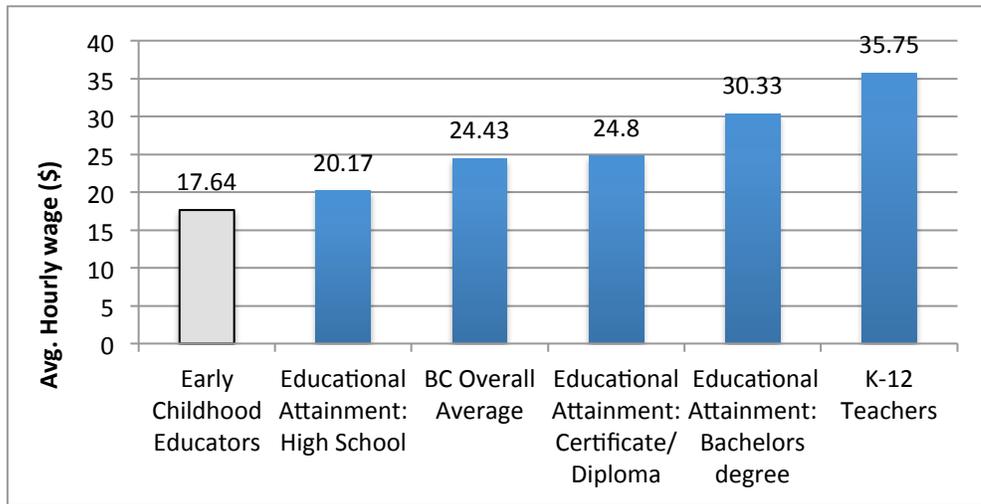
## **2.2. The Canadian early childhood workforce**

Educators in Canada's childcare system consistently face "low pay, high staff turnover and persistent workforce shortages" (Fairholm and Davis 2012, p. 153). This inability to recruit qualified educators, and poor retention of those who do work in the field negatively impacts outcomes for children, and presents barriers to sustaining quality in the early childhood system (Whitebook et al, 1993). This section outlines key challenges in the workforce, and their impact on overall quality.

### **2.2.1. Incommensurate wages and benefits**

Low wages are often cited as the main barrier to ensuring an educated, high quality workforce (Schilder, 2016). Of particular concern is incommensurate pay, where wages well below the standard compensation relative to expected skill and education levels. Figure 2 below compares average hourly wages for educators in BC against average wages by highest levels of educational attainment, and against teachers in the K-12 public system, using the Statistics Canada category of Early Childhood Educators and Assistants (ECEs & As).

**Figure 3. Average hourly wage by job type or education attainment: BC 2013/14**



Source: Labour Force Survey-April 2014, Friendly et al 2015

Educators in BC are paid wages well below the average for workers with comparable levels of education, creating clear barriers to raising, or even sustaining levels of qualification. Further, they earn less than many individuals doing similar work in the public sector: of 2014, educators were paid on average less than half the wage of a teacher in the K-12 public education system.

In addition to low wages, educators working with young children in Canada rarely have access to employment health, pension, or paid sick leave. In 2012, just 48% of Canadian ECEC centre staff reported access to medical coverage, and only 63% to paid sick leave (FBV, 2013). Without such benefits workers lack economic security, contributing to overall worker dissatisfaction, and increasing turnover (Totenhagen et al, 2016). Disproportionately low compensation underlies many of the issues restricting quality by contributing to difficulties in recruitment of qualified workers, high turnover, and insufficient financial stability for workers to enhance their own qualifications (Ackerman, 2006).

### **2.2.2. Turnover**

High turnover rates negatively impact children's language and socio-emotional development by inhibiting the development of trusting, attached relationships with their caregivers (Ackerman, 2006). It also results in a dearth of experienced educators able to develop and apply knowledge over time, or to mentor and help prepare new educators.

Although data is not systematically collected on ECE recruitment and retention in Canada, the most recent systematic assessment identified turnover rates of 25%-45% per annum, far above the average for most sectors (CCHRSC, 2009). The report found systematic evidence of shortages of qualified educators across Canada, resulting in long-term vacancies (CCHRSC, 2009). According to 2012 survey data, 20% of staff in BC's licensed ECEC centres were currently looking for a new job, exceeding the national average of 16% (FBV, 2013).

When employers struggle to find qualified educators, there is a tendency for employers and policy-makers to lower their standards, resulting in large-scale entry of unskilled workers into the labour market. Research on the Canadian context contends that "expansion of services in [the ECEC] sector often leads to a lessening of quality as more inexperienced staff are taken on" (Fairholm and Davis 2012, p. 153). This dynamic is of particular concern in the current context of rapidly expanding ECEC, driven by changes in the labour market and economy overall.

### **2.2.3. Low qualification levels, inadequate training, and stress**

Requirements for educator qualifications in Canada vary from province to province, but none require all providers to have post-secondary qualifications. Most regions enforce minimum numbers of staff with some form of college-level certification, either in the form of a one-year certificate or two-year diploma. The most recent available evidence on overall qualifications in ECEC centres finds that 89.6% of program staff have some form of post-secondary ECEC-related credential, but that just 59.1% have a two-year diploma (Flanagan, Beach & Varmuza [FBR] 2013). Qualification levels are even lower outside of centre-based, certified spaces; in these settings, a majority of workers do not have any early childhood credentials (CCHRSC, 2009).

Inadequate educator training may also inherently contribute to lower retention rates (Totenhagen et al., 2016). Educators in Canada often have as little as one-year diplomas, or no sector specific training at all, which may leave them feeling unprepared for challenging work, resulting in higher levels of stress, frustration, and worsened turnover rates (Schilder, 2016). Access to continued training and development are often poorly supported, with ECEs having to take time off paid work or sacrifice weekends to enhance skills (Fuller, 2011).

Canadian educators routinely report high levels of workplace depression and anxiety, contributing to high levels of burnout in the profession (Wagner et al, 2012). ECE workers report entering the field with altruistic intentions of serving the public good, but finding the work is difficult, stressful, and underappreciated (Ferns & Friendly, 2014). In formal evaluations of stress factors, working with young children is found to place high demands, provide low degrees of control over the workplace, and have low levels of social support for staff, all of which contribute to high risk for occupational stress (Wagner et al, 2012). In recent years, several sources also note that increasing demands are being made of ECEs, including working with diverse populations, different language groups, and requirements to adhere to higher standards of curriculum, all of which add strain (OECD 2015).

#### **2.2.4. Inequitable quality**

The OECD's landmark Starting Strong (2001), and Starting Strong II (2006) multi-country reviews argue that ECEC is not only a tool for improving educational outcomes, but also a powerful way to address societal inequalities between children that otherwise form early, and persist throughout life. Comprehensive assessments of different interventions support this view, finding that the most consistent and dramatic evidence of benefits from ECEC is found among children from disadvantaged backgrounds (WPP 2015, Currie & Rossin-Slater, 2015).

Geographic studies on ECEC services in Canada are very limited, but those that exist show that neighbourhoods of lower socio-economic status (SES) tend to have fewer early years services available for children and families (Prentice, 2007), and those

present tend to be of lower quality (Maggi et al, 2004). Lower quality may be a direct result of inadequate resources, resulting in diminished ability to attract competent staff. An empirical study using regression analysis of childcare centres across Canada finds that centres with higher proportions of subsidized children tend to pay lower staff wages (CCHRSC, 2009). Overall, this suggests that services are both rare and of poorer quality in neighbourhoods with the highest proportion of vulnerable children—the group that would likely obtain the most benefit from them (Maggi et al, 2004).

Particularly affected by inequitable service availability and quality are Canada's Indigenous populations. Indigenous Canadians, comprising First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples, represent the fastest growing segment of the population (Preston et al, 2011). Many Indigenous communities are located in rural or isolated regions, and have minimal access to early childhood services—particularly ones that are culturally appropriate (Preston et al, 2011). While the Federal Government has responsibility for services specifically delivered on First Nations reserves, a significant role exists for provincial governments to ensure sufficient availability of culturally appropriate services by qualified Indigenous educators in a way that empowers Indigenous communities (Ibid.).

## **Chapter 3. Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care**

### **3.1. Educators and quality**

While research consistently shows that ECEC can contribute to children's social, emotional, cognitive and educational development, there is disagreement over what constitutes "quality" in these settings (Currie & Rossin-Slater, 2015). Different conceptions of quality are often rooted in cultural conceptions of children's development, and the role children play in society (OECD, 2011). In liberal democracies like Canada, policymakers have focussed predominantly on the potential for ECEC to generate economic growth through developing human capital: this has led to a focus on the educational aspects of care, and an association with the formal educational system (OECD, 2011). By contrast, certain social-democratic countries such as Norway or Sweden conceptualize children's development more holistically, in terms of an overall health, learning, and relationship-based well-being; as result, early years services are more often delivered in integrated approaches intended to support whole child (OECD, 2011).

Despite these differences, there is a broad consensus among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers that high-quality care requires well-educated, qualified, and experienced staff (Urban et al, 2012). Classrooms staffed by ECEs with higher levels of education tend to provide richer learning environments for young children in terms of language and literacy (Barnett, 2003). Teachers with post-secondary education in ECEC are also more likely to provide higher-quality teacher-child interactions (Fuligni et al, 2009), and are typically better able to design and adapt instruction and learning environments to children's developmental needs (Fuller, 2011). Less qualified educators are also more prone to burnout, and frequently intend to work in ECEC for shorter periods of time, contributing to sector turnover (Press, Wong & Gibson, 2015).

Some academics evince concerns that the evidence may be overstated, and that more highly qualified educators are drawn to higher-quality programs, making it difficult to identify whether the educators are the specific causes of improved outcomes (Fuligni et al, 2009). Nevertheless, the basic association between educator credentials and children's outcomes is considered one of the most well-established findings in early childhood research (Ackerman 2006), and has resulted in a widespread effort to enhance ECE qualifications across North America (Schilder, 2016).

### **3.1.1. Who benefits from high-quality ECEC?**

Despite a strong general agreement on the advantages of investing in the early years, there is a lack of consensus on which specific types of interventions are most effective or important (WPP, 2015). In Canada, the debate has primarily focused on arguments for universal services (provided to all children), and arguments for more targeted interventions focused toward disadvantaged children and families.

There is no question that disadvantaged children particularly stand to benefit from high-quality ECEC. The strongest evidence for ECE's beneficial outcomes derives from longitudinal studies employing experimental methodology, which are considered the "gold standard" of developmental research (WPP, 2015). Some of the most commonly cited studies are the HighScope Perry Preschool study (Benfield, Barnett & Schweinhart, 2006), and the Abecedarian Project (Masse & Barnet, 2002). Both were U.S.-based, employed teachers with advanced credentials, and targeted toward highly disadvantaged populations. These studies tracked life-long effects of interventions, finding large improvements in education, health, employment, reduced use of social services, lower likelihood of incarceration, and a host of other benefits (WPP, 2015; Benfield, Barnett & Schweinhart, 2006; Masse & Barnet, 2002).

Baker (2011) argues that evidence from these targeted approaches, with their highly disadvantaged populations and intensive interventions, are being inappropriately used to justify much more diffuse, universal programs provided to all children. While universal programs have shown positive results, effects are more difficult to evaluate, and the evidence base is much smaller than for targeted interventions (Baker 2011;

Currie & Rossin-Slater, 2015). Evaluations of Quebec’s universal childcare program, for example, show mixed results in children’s educational and behaviour outcomes, with even negative outcomes among some groups (Baker, Gruber and Milligan, 2008).

Proponents of universal interventions counter that Quebec’s negative results appear to be an exception: evaluations of increases in out-of-home childcare in Spain, Norway, and parts of the USA have all documented improvements to both short and long-term educational and employment outcomes for children (Felfe et al, 2015). Some sources argue that Quebec’s poor results result from the very rapid increase in the quantity of services without due attention to quality (Haeck and Merrigan, 2015). Furthermore, while children from lower SES are more prone to developmental vulnerabilities, targeting services to this group alone would miss the large bulk of vulnerable children, who are in fact found in middle-and-upper income families (Kershaw et al, 2009). A system of “targeted universality” could ensure that a baseline of affordable care is provided, while directing more resources to children with more intensive care needs (Kershaw et al, 2009).

While there is a basic agreement here that more disadvantaged parents and children should have access to high-quality care, the debate revolves around the question of whether government should ensure high-quality for all, as is done with the educational system, or if it should maintain a minimum involvement, stepping in only to supplement or regulate where the private market fails (WPP 2016; Prentice, 2007). The answer to these questions depend heavily on starting assumptions about how well markets are able to deliver quality ECEC. The next section considers several explanations why Canadian childcare markets have historically struggled to deliver high-quality outcomes.

### **3.2. Explanations of low ECEC quality**

Despite the abundance of evidence on the benefits from high-quality care, educator compensation remains persistently low, and regulation weak (Prentice, 2007). This raises the question: even as social recognition of these benefits increases, why have wages failed to increase accordingly? This section addresses two related

explanations: first, economic theory on failures in the market-based delivery of childcare are discussed, followed by a summary of some gender-based analyses of ECEC.

### **3.2.1. Childcare markets and service equity**

Historically, childcare services in Canada have mainly been viewed as either a matter of individual welfare, or a way to promote women's labour force participation, rather than as a right, educational service, or entitlement from government (Prentice, 2016). As a result, unlike the public K-12 school system, every province in Canada continues to deploy primarily market-based approaches to childcare, delivered through private or non-profit providers, with parental fees covering the majority of costs (White & Friendly, 2012). The recent shift towards viewing early childhood services as a social investment into long-term wellbeing has placed considerable strain on the market-based delivery model.

According to conventional economic theory, markets deliver goods in accordance with the value individuals in society attribute to them. The mechanism is price: if a stable workforce of qualified ECEs is valuable, then employers ought to be able to charge fees high enough to pay adequate wages. But childcare is unlike many other goods, and a set of well-documented failures tend to occur in these markets (CCHRSC, 2009). Paul (2011) summarizes several of them as follows:

- Information failures: parents may lack information or understanding of the full long-term benefits, be poor judges of quality in ECEC, or be deceived by providers.
- Inability to pay: parents may simply be unable to secure funds or credit to pay for high-quality ECEC.
- High market entry costs: meeting regulatory requirements requires substantial up-front investments, particularly for centre-based providers, meaning that there is little competitive pressure to increase quality.
- Local monopolies: a limited number of provider options, especially in geographic area, may mean that parents have little choice in terms of quality.

Childcare markets are also subject to what economists term positive externality failures: the pricing mechanism fails to capture benefits accruing to society more broadly (CCHRSC, 2009). This is a particularly well-noted factor in ECEC, where societal returns on investment into quality include decreased crime, increased employment, higher tax revenues, and a host of other benefits (WPP, 2015). These returns are often used to justify public investment into care, although it should not be assumed that all programs will generate the same effects (Baker, 2011).

### **3.2.2. Gender and care labour**

Some commentators explain the failure to invest in quality ECEC by foregrounding the gendered nature of care work, and societal assumptions about the value of women's labour. As of the most recent reports, more than 98% of Canadian ECE workers are women, making it one of the most distinctly gendered professions in the country (FBV, 2013). This division is a remnant of historical gendered divisions of household labour, wherein childrearing tended to be unpaid work, provided by women (Ferns & Friendly, 2014). As a result, woman's gender has historically been assumed to bestow the full range of skills, knowledge, and attributes needed for caring for and educating young children, as an extension of their presumed familial role (Ackerman, 2006).

Ackerman (2006) describes this as a continuing failure to distinguish between "real teaching and babysitting" (P. 97). Despite extensive evidence on the challenging, complex pedagogical role that ECEs play, a mistaken assumption that ECEC is low-skilled work may persist among both parents and policymakers. As a result, even as countries increasingly perceive the early years as integral to long-term development, there has been relatively little public recognition of those working in the field as educators making significant positive contributions to society (OECD, 2015). The low value attached to care work in turn drives down wages in the sector (CCHRSC, 2009).

Challenges may also arise from providers perceiving their own work as a public good, rather than a market transaction. ECE services require high ratios of staff to children, making them highly labour intensive enterprises. In Canada, providers must

rely primarily on fees to cover these costs. Any increase to staff wages entails significant costs passed on to parents, who may struggle to pay them. Cumming, Sumsion & Wong (2016) point out that educators and employers are often reluctant to ask for higher wages, and thereby impose additional costs on parents. This conflict creates tension in educators' relationships with clients, and may clash with professional identity in a field ostensibly dedicated to the public good.

## **Chapter 4. The BC Context**

### **4.1. Current policy context**

The British Columbia Government has set the goal of becoming the “best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent” (BC Government, 2006). In the past decade, BC’s government has followed a wider Canadian and international trend of augmenting early years services with educational focuses, primarily by extending programs within the formal education system. Beginning in the early 2000’s, the Ministry of Education began creating StrongStart BC programs, offering part-day, ECE-led education to parents who bring along their young children; today, over 160 centres are in operation, typically located in schools and offering higher wages than their centre-based counterparts.

In 2008, BC’s government directed a cross-ministerial Early Childhood Learning Agency (ECLA) to assess expanding early learning options, including full-day kindergarten for 4-and-5 year olds and full-day early learning services for 3 -year -olds. In its 2009 report, the agency identified several recommendations regarding facilities, operating costs and implementation, and placed a particular focus on maintaining quality and human resources (ECLA, 2008). Following the agency’s report, in 2010 BC began implementing a full-day kindergarten for 5-year-olds, with full roll-out completed by 2013.

In 2013, seeking to reconcile a growing diversity of services, BC formed a new Office of the Early Years to coordinate services across Ministries of Education, Health, and Children and Family Development. The Office strategy identifies a three-pronged approach of improving access, quality and affordability, and asserts a mandate to ensure efforts “remain focused on evidence-based options and outcomes” (BC Government, p.3). The strategy commits to expanding childcare by 13,000 spaces by 2020, and creates a new network of community-based Early Years Centres, providing direct

support to parents and referrals to the increasingly diverse network of programs. As of a 2015 progress report, 26 of these Early Years Centres had been created, with an expansion to a further 21 communities planned for 2016-17.

With regards to service quality, BC's strategy appears to be targeted primarily at providing enhanced information to parents on quality of care through Early Years Centres and an online service identifying available ECEC services, and quality ratings. The majority of investments recently have been into the formal education system, maintaining the historical division between childcare and education.

Notably absent from BC's Early Years Strategy is a cross-ministerial approach to human resources. This is despite cautions from the 2009 Early Childhood Learning Agency report that "Regardless of the model chosen, a comprehensive human resource plan will be required—not only to ensure support for new early learning programs, but also to ensure sufficient staffing for child care programs, many of which employ ECEs" (BC Government 2009, P. 3).

## **4.2. Educator and quality management**

Consistent with the ethos of a market-based system, BC uses a system of regulations to maintain quality and manage educator training and qualification levels. These regulations are balanced with a system of subsidies, primarily targeted towards a small number of low-income parents.

To register as a qualified ECE in BC, candidates require a 10-month certificate with 500 hours of experience, or to have an equivalent certification from another jurisdiction. After this, workers may transition into additional year-long infant/toddler or special needs diplomas. Table 1 below outlines BC's qualification requirements for workers in ECE settings.

**Table 1. BC's childcare certification requirements**

<b>Certification Level</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Responsible adult	Completed at least 20 hours of relevant coursework
Early Childhood Educator Assistant (ECEA)	Completion of at least one college-level course in ECE field
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	902 hours instruction (10 months) + 500 hours work experience
Infant/Toddler (I/T)	ECE + 250 hours instruction and 200 hour practicum
Special Needs	ECE + 250 hours instruction and 200-hour practicum

Source: MCFD website, adapted by the author

As of January 12, 2017, BC's Early Childhood Educator registry reported 16,072 registered Early Childhood Educators, and 6,123 registered ECE Assistants. Of the registered ECEs, 3,123 have special needs certificates, and 4,567 have Infant/Toddler certificates (MCFD email communication, Jan. 12, 2017). It is not known how many of these are actively working in the registered childcare sector, as this information is not tracked by MCFD (for a workforce profile of ECEs in BC, see Appendix B).

MCFD manages qualification levels primarily through regulations requiring a minimum ratio of qualified ECEs per child in regulated care. Exceptions are permitted on a case-by-case for centres that face challenges in meeting these requirements. Table 2 below summarizes the basic ratio requirements and group sizes for different care types in BC, and the corresponding staffing certification requirements.

**Table 2. BC childcare regulations by care type**

<b>Child Care Type</b>	<b>Max number children per staff member</b>	<b>Max group sizes</b>	<b>Staff certifications at full group size</b>
Under 36 months	4	12	1 I/T, 1 ECE, 1 ECEA
30 months-school entry	8	25	1 ECE, 2 ECEAs
Preschool	10	20	1 ECE, 1 ECEA
Kindergarten-grade 1	12	24	2 Responsible adults
Above grade 1	15	30	2 Responsible adults
Multi-age	8	8	1 ECE
Family Child Care*	7	7	Responsible adult

\*In addition to restrictions on number of very young children, and criminal record checks, Source: MCFD website, adapted by the author.

Staff certification requirements are more stringent for younger children, reflecting the need for specialized attention at this age. Registered family childcare arrangements require only a responsible adult designation, with 20 hours of training (although operators may hold an ECE certificate in any case). There are no educational requirements for License-not-required and unregistered providers.

The large majority of childcare centre costs are covered through parent fees, which are independently set by providers. Some additional supporting is provided through subsidies to parents tied to income, and direct funding provided to centres through the Child Care Operating Fund (CCOF). Table 3 summarizes expenditures from MCFD’s most recent performance report. Funding breakdowns do not distinguish family and centre-based care.

**Table 3. MCFD expenditures on childcare: 2015-2016**

<b>Funding type:</b>	<b>BC annual expenditures (Millions)</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Child Care Subsidy	\$109.04	50%
Child Care Operating Funding	\$85.75	39%
Child Care Other	\$24.74	11%
Total ECEC	\$219.52	100%

Source: MCFD 2016

Though subsidies comprise the largest part of BC’s expenditures, in the 2015-2016 year they supported just 19,340 children, or 3.2% of all children aged 0-12 (MCFD, 2016). CCOF provides subsidies to centres, family-based providers, and license-not-required providers, with amounts varying by centre type and age of child. In general, higher rates are provided for centre-based care, and for younger children.

#### **4.2.1. Workforce development**

MCFD’s regulation of childcare providers is comprised of has very few initiatives directly targeting the issue of qualified educator recruitment and retention. Through research and interviews, two programs were identified over the course of this project directly addressing the childcare workforce:

- **Bursaries:** The Early Childhood Educator Bursary program is an initiative providing bursaries of \$300 per course up to a maximum of \$1500 per student. The fund is administrated by ECEBC, and funded through the Ministry of Children and Family Development; limited funds are available, and funding criteria give preference to Indigenous applicants and those earning Infant Toddler certifications.
- **Community Learning and Childcare Facilitators Pilot Project:** This pilot program began in 2011 out of the Unit for Early Years Research and Development at the University of Victoria. Participating ECEs attend monthly learning circles, led by trained facilitators, to reflect on innovative ways of engaging with families and children. The program is based in Coquitlam and Victoria, with intentions of expanding to other communities.

## **Chapter 5. Methodology**

This study undertakes a three-part methodology: Literature review, expert interviews, and survey analysis. Collectively, these methodologies address the two core questions of this study. First, what are the nature and scope of recruitment and retention challenges experienced by ECE employers in BC? Second, how can ECEC policies be most effectively used to address these problems? Because of the wide scope of this subject, the analysis is subject to important limitations, outlined in greater detail below.

### **5.1. Expert and stakeholder interviews**

Interviews with several policy and research experts provide crucial depth and nuance to this study. In total, 7 interviews were conducted with child development experts, a Ministry of Children and Family Development policy analyst, and public advocates. Participants were carefully selected in order to encompass policy expertise and knowledge of the BC context specifically, and national and international approaches to resolving issues of educator recruitment and retention. Interviews were conducted in person or over the phone, and recorded for note-taking purposes. A semi-structured interview method was used, with general, open-ended questions used to begin the discussion of a topic area, and follow-up discussion and questions flowing from the conversation. A set of themes was developed out of the interview notes, and responses from all participants were grouped into those themes. Results from this analysis are summarized in the Interview Data section below.

Expert interviews add depth of information and complexity. Individuals familiar with both the academic and practical aspects of this problem assist in making connections between elements of theory, research, history, and pragmatic aspects of policy context. Given the time and resource constraints of this project, expert interviews allowed for the efficient gathering of a broad array of information.

## **5.2. Survey results analysis**

A subset of survey data is analyzed from ECEC employers and workers throughout BC. This data was collected in 2012 as part of a project titled “You Bet We Still Care: A Survey of Centre-Based Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada.” Kathleen Flanagan and associates conducted the research on behalf of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. The authors have generously provided access to a portion of the dataset for use in this study.

The original You Bet We Still Care (YBWSC) survey was conducted online. It included 1,145 employers and 4,000 employees working in full-day, licensed childcare centres that provided spaces for toddlers and/or preschool age children from across Canada (ages 0-6). Respondents were recruited through email, online advertisement, or mailed letters. Surveys were reviewed and approved by the Research Ethic Board at York University. The BC subset analyzed for this study comprises 422 respondents, of which 218 reported having hiring responsibilities (referred to simply as “employers” from here on). The bulk of questions regarding recruitment and retention were directed only to this latter group.

Responses from BC centres are analyzed to assess employers’ perceptions on challenges in recruitment. Results are also analyzed for patterns of responses based on factors like urban or rural location, or size of the centre. A limited analysis is conducted using descriptive statistics of the responses. More sophisticated statistical techniques such as regression analyses are not appropriate with this data, due to limited sample size and non-random sampling technique. Although the voluntary sampling methodology means that results cannot be considered necessarily representative of BC’s ECEC providers, respondents represent a significant cross-section of employers in BC, and important lessons can be identified from the knowledge and perspectives conveyed through their survey responses

### **5.3. Job listings analysis**

Given the lack of available systematic workforce data, I used a single job listings board to gain insights into trends in demand for early childhood educators in BC. The West Coast Childcare Resource Centre (WCCRC) is an organization located in Vancouver that has been providing information, resources, referrals and training related to ECE since 1987. For approximately 10 years, this has included maintaining a job board of employment opportunities for ECEs. The board hosts between 300-400 job listings per year directed specifically toward early childhood workers. The WCCRC listings are focused primarily on the Vancouver area, so may not be representative of the province; nevertheless, they provide some important insights.

For this study, I analyze 7 years of job postings across variables of qualification requirements and type of care offered. These permit an overview of trends in recent years in demand for different types of care and educators, and some indication of where potential problems may be focused.

### **5.4. Limitations**

The subject of workforce development in ECEC is tremendously complex in its history, causes, theoretical discourse, and impacts. Each early childhood educator has a unique set of motivations and experiences surrounding their career choice and professional development. The limited methods used in this study cannot fully capture the full complexity, variety, and depth of these experiences.

There is minimal publicly collected Canadian data available on this subject. Unlike other countries, few Canadian provinces track statistics on recruitment and retention. BC in particular neither monitors nor publishes workforce information on a regular basis. Statistics Canada publishes very limited information on the National Occupation Category of Early Childhood Educators and Assistants (NOC 4214). Using job listings from a single postings board was a creative solution that allowed for comparison across time, but may not be representative of the province as a whole. The YBWSC survey did not include some questions that would have informed the purposes

of this study, resulting in some regrettably omitted questions, such as, for example, a measure of worker turnover within centres.

Certain population sub-groups with known different needs and experiences cannot be adequately addressed in this study. Just as a few examples, the specific dimensions of ECEC for Indigenous communities, newly immigrated Canadians, refugees, and rural and remote Canadians are under-explored in much of this analysis, and worthy of further in-depth examination.

Finally, this study is limited by constraints on resources and time. Future research would benefit particularly from more extensive in-depth qualitative research into educator's experiences and perceptions of their work.

## **Chapter 6. Research Findings**

This chapter provides an assessment of BC's problems of ECEC recruitment and retention, identifying key issues and strengths to build on. It begins with data analysis of an ECEC job listing board from 2014-2016, highlighting evidence of increasing demand, and where problems are particularly concentrated. This is followed by an overview of key problem drivers exacerbating problems of recruitment and retention. Given the lack of systematic data on this subject, a combination of government reports, survey analysis, primary research culled from job listing data and interviews are marshalled to provide as clear and in depth an analysis as possible.

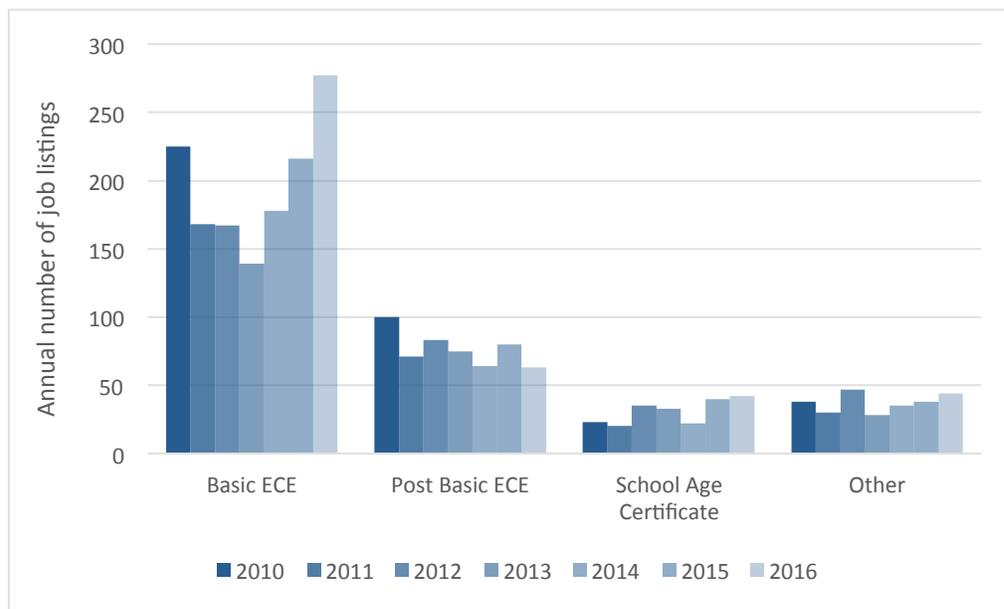
### **6.1.1. Nature of problem: job listing analysis and interviews**

To assess questions regarding changes in demand for ECEs, data analysis was performed on a publicly available dataset of ECE listings. As there is no consistent data on trends in the ECE workforce, analysis was performed on a single site, permitting historical comparison of job listings.

Analysis of the WCCRC job listing dataset shows a decrease in 2010-11, followed by a recent rapid uptick in listings for early childhood workers. The sudden drop after 2010 coincides with the introduction of universal full-day kindergarten, which eased some of the demand for childcare workers. This appears to be only a temporary effect: between 2014-2016, annual advertisements for educators on the WCCRC site skyrocketed by 47%, from 299 to 441. These changes cannot be explained by employment growth alone: Between 2013-14 and 2015-16, for example, the childcare spaces in the province increased by just 2.7%, from 98,700 to 101,371 (MCFD 2014, MCFD 2016).

In terms of specific qualifications sought by employers, the large majority of listings were for individuals with basic ECE qualifications (61%), followed by Post-ECE (comprising Infant/Toddler and special needs) at 19%, 'Other' at 11% and, finally, school-age care at 9%. The most rapid growth in demand was for workers with 'Basic ECE' qualification, which increased by 61% from 178 listings in 2014, to 287 in 2016. Listings for school-age qualification grew very rapidly as well, but from a smaller baseline: by 95% from 22 to 43 listings (See Appendix A for more detail).

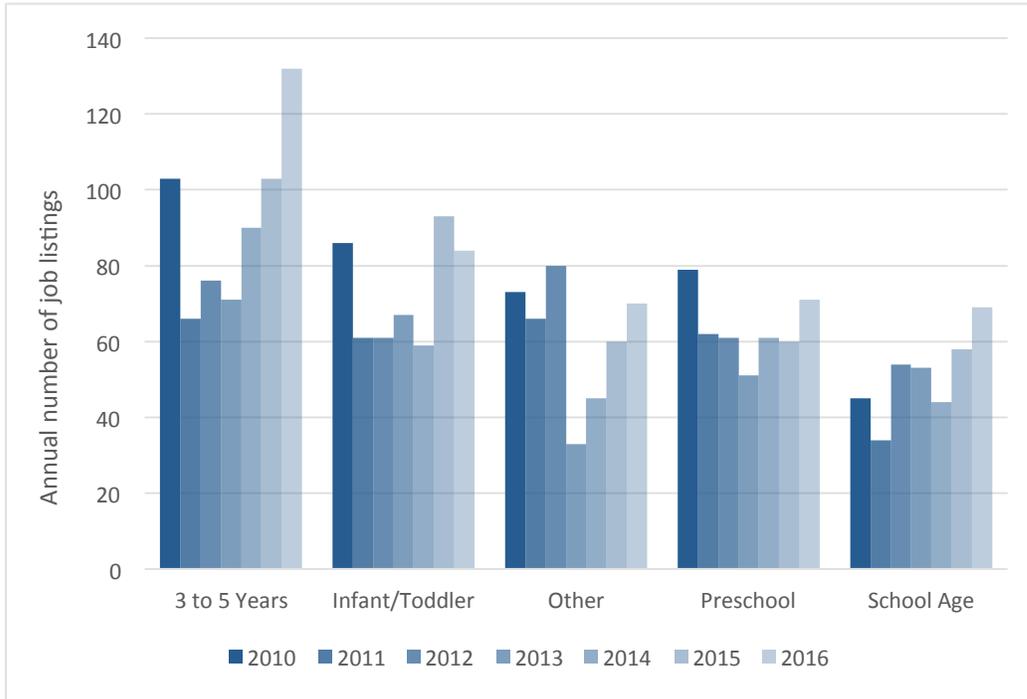
**Figure 4. WCCRC job listings by qualifications required: 2010-2016**



Interviewees affirmed a perception that ECEC centres are increasingly struggling to find and hire qualified educators. Although interviewees stated that recruitment and retention has been an issue for decades, several emphasized that problems had substantially worsened in recent years. Emily Mliczko, the Executive Director for Early Childhood Educators of BC, with over two decades of experience in the childcare sector, noted, “in the last 12 to 18 months, we call it a crisis within the sector, [the recruitment and retention issue] has just blown into proportions I have never seen before.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Interview, November 23, 2016.

**Figure 5. WCCRC job listings by childcare type: 2010-2016**



Also notable in the WCCRC listings was the disproportionate presence of Infant/Toddler (I/T) programs, which provide post-basic ECE credentials to work with children under 30 months. Advertisements for I/T specific programs made up 21% of all listings, yet children under 30 months constitute only 6% of all childcare spaces in BC. This is likely partly explained by the higher required ratios for infants and toddlers, and faster-than-average growth in spaces for this age group (MCFD, 2016). Nevertheless, the significant increase in listings coupled with interview data suggests particular difficulty in staffing positions requiring I/T qualifications.

Several interviewees agreed that problems of recruitment and retention persisted in all programs, but suggested challenges were exacerbated in rural programs, and in programs requiring infant/toddler and special needs trained educators. Of particular concern is when these shortages result in reduced centre spaces available for children. Emily Mliczko notes the constraint inadequate staffing places on centres' abilities to expand to meet demand: "We're seeing the government has made a huge commitment to increase the number of spaces here in BC, but we know that some of those programs

aren't able to open to capacity once they're built, or they're not able to open at all in some cases, or like half the centre is able to open because they don't have the staff."<sup>3</sup>

### 6.1.2. Survey data: summary

An analysis of survey data confirms that recruitment challenges remain pervasive across BC centres. 61% of ECEC directors reported at least one permanent employee leaving in the past year. Further, 77% of managers reported that it was somewhat or very difficult to hire substitute staff; among rural programs, this number rose to 81%.

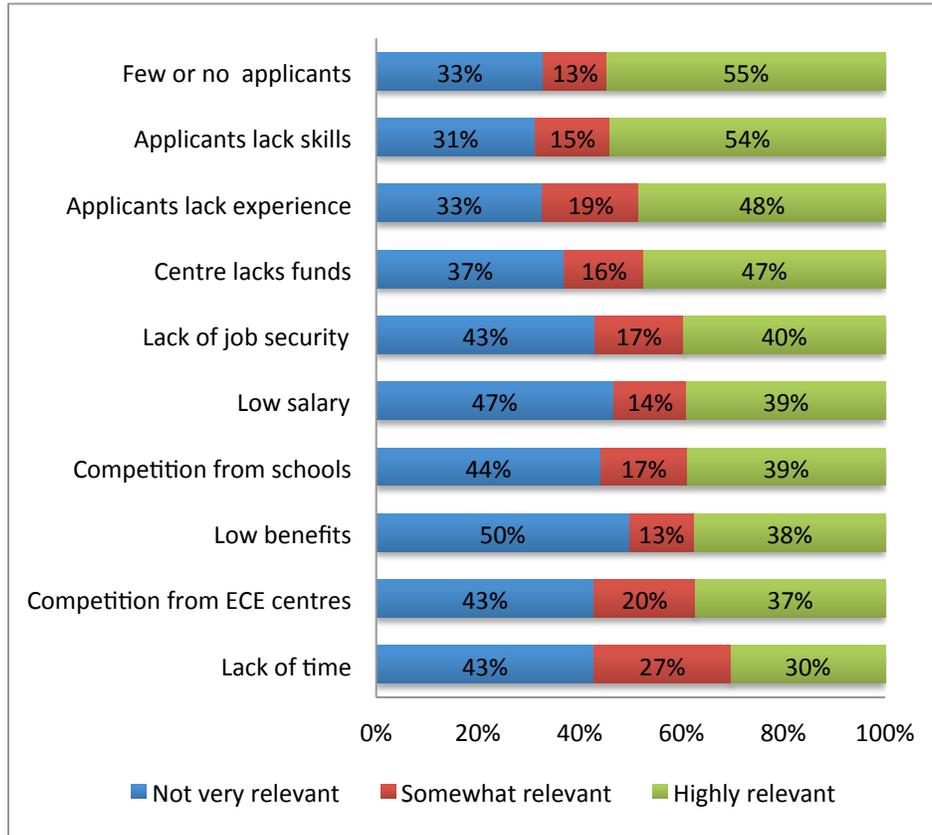
**Table 4. Ease or difficulty of hiring ECE substitute staff by urban or rural location**

	Rural	Urban	Overall
<b>Very or somewhat easy</b>	9%	14%	14%
<b>Neither</b>	9%	9%	9%
<b>Difficult or very difficult</b>	81%	77%	77%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%
<b>N:</b>	(32)	(163)	(195)

Employers were asked about a series of potential causes of recruitment challenges. Specifically, questions asked respondents to rank how relevant a particular challenge was from 1 (not relevant at all) to 5 (very relevant). Responses were grouped into “relevant” (4 or 5 out of 5), somewhat relevant (3) and “not very relevant” (1 or 2 out of 5). Figure 4 shows the results of these responses as a proportion of overall responses.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, November 23 2016

**Figure 6. ECE employer ratings of hiring challenges by relevance**



Source: You Bet We Still Care Survey dataset 2012

Of all the options available, the two problems most likely to be identified as relevant by employers were having few or no applicants (55%), and applicants lacking adequate skills (54%). This was followed by complaints that candidates lacked experience (48%), or that centres lacked funds to conduct hiring process (47%). Together, these indicate that employers perceive a major lack of qualified, skilled applicants seeking employment in the early childhood sector. The least relevant factors were lack of time to conduct hiring (30%), and competition for other ECE centres (37%). Interestingly, low salary and low benefits were ranked low among relevant causes, putting employer’s perspectives somewhat at odds with previous research. It is possible that this discrepancy reflects a difference between how workforce challenges impact centres individually, and how they impact the field overall: employers may expect that

ECEs seeking employment know in advance that compensation will be low, and so perceive it as less important to their own individual recruitment processes.

In a written response section, employers identified several further specific problems. Several remarked on inadequate preparation of educators, with a particular focus on poorly prepared ECE assistants: “ECE is watered down to 30 hr Assistant License so no real ECEs”, and “BC ECE Assistant license is weakening the quality of qualified EC Educators”. But several also expressed concern that the quality of registered ECEs may be low as well, stating that “private colleges=low quality ece”, and “lack of quality ECEs”. Other challenges repeatedly identified included poor language skills, applicants finding higher wage jobs, inability to advance in the sector, and long commutes.

Results also suggest that recruitment challenges are resulting in fewer childcare spaces available. Amongst employers surveyed, 11% reported at least one instance of reducing centre spaces due to lack of staff, and 8% reported having to close a centre entirely at least once for the same reason.

### **6.1.3. Interview findings: problem drivers**

Interviewees identified a set of key themes feeding the current BC crisis in ECEC recruitment and retention. The central themes identified here include pay and benefits, lack of respect and sexism, competition from the education system, inadequate staff education, role clarity and advancement, small centre size and poor support

#### **Pay and benefits**

Interviewees for this study all identified the issue of low pay and a dearth of employment benefits. Respondents emphasized, however, that pay is not the only feature that matters: respondents expressed some frustration that disproportionately low pay is such a glaring feature of ECEC that it tends to dominate discussions of the subject, at the expense of other factors that may matter equally.

Incommensurate pay—that is, pay low relative to the level of skill and qualification required—not only creates intrinsic disincentive to work in ECEC, but also contributes to a perception of ECEC as lower status than other, similar work requiring the exact same sets of skills and qualifications. Participants argued that supplements to pay and benefits must support at minimum a basic standard of living, but are likely to be most effective if they create a sense of recognition and respect for the work done by educators. This means, particularly, pay that acknowledges more experience, skill, and commitment to the ECEC field.

As noted in the literature review, compensation is difficult to address through market mechanisms. In BC's market-based childcare system, the only option for managers to augment wages is to charge higher fees to parents. Interviewees suggested that centre staff and managers are often reluctant to raise fees, knowing this will make services inaccessible to their clients. As a result, managers and staff feel pressure to effectively subsidize parents' costs with their own wages or time.

### **Lack of respect and sexism**

Beyond incommensurate pay, interviewees consistently identified the lack of respect for childcare sector as the most important factor influencing the sector's ability to recruit and retain high-quality staff. One noted, "overall, many people don't feel valued for the work that they're doing, it's even hard to explain to our, our own families that this is the career choice that we've made, and they'll say, oh, but what are you really going to do when you grow up? [instead of saying:] this is a really good career choice to make."

Several interviewees explicitly identified sexist norms underlying this devaluation of the profession. Work in ECEC includes a major component of emotional labour: forming trust, attachment, belonging and security; and prioritizing the needs of children. These characteristics continue to be perceived as feminine, and lower in value than more intellectual or physical work. As one interviewee commented:

Often there's a case that there's a presumption that because a person is female that they're automatically qualified and capable to provide high quality child care... if it's just seen as just caregiving or as just babysitting and anyone can do it, then it isn't deserving of a significant amount of respect or decent pay or

benefits or a pension. If it's just women's work anyway, then it isn't deserving of much.

The sexist assumption that the complex set of skills, attributes, and abilities required for high quality ECEC is somehow inherently bestowed by virtue of one's gender creates a societal misperception that workers are plentifully available.

### **Competition from the education system**

Several interviewees expressed concern that the education system is increasingly out-competing childcare for qualified workers. Though the promulgation of research on the profound educational importance of the early years has not improved wages or recognition in the childcare sector, it has resulted in increased demand for ECE certified employees in educational sector and other areas. As one interviewee noted, "Qualified people, talented people with natural skills and ability, if they do enter the field, if they go to college for their certificate or diploma or their bachelor, once they get out into the sector it's hard to keep those qualified talented people in the sector, they go elsewhere in the sector, typically in the education system". A recent proliferation of StrongStart Facilities was mentioned repeatedly as a factor in competition for applicants, as each employ at least one registered ECE and offer higher wages. In-hospital childhood care programs have also burgeoned, as have others. One interviewee noted the irony in this change: while once research had called for more career opportunities across early childhood education, now the explosion of opportunities in other sectors is drawing away the best young educators for childcare, worsening the recruitment and retention problem for the sector.

### **Inadequate staff education**

ECEs are also put under stress by having to supervise and mentor inadequately trained, inexperienced staff, contributing to turnover. Under the present system, qualified ECEs are often working alongside Educational Assistants, who require just one college-level course, or even "responsible adults", who require just 20 hours of training. One interviewee suggested this not only contributes to educators feeling undervalued, but also creates tremendous stress: ECEs in these situations may feel afraid to ever leave children in the hands of persons with little preparation or training.

Even when educators have earned their 10-month ECE certificate, participants suggested this may be inadequate. ECE certificate programs may vary considerably in quality between different colleges, and may provide little time for practical hands-on experience. Both interviewees and survey respondents stated that qualified ECEs may be of highly varying quality, and particularly were concerned that private college programs were producing less well-trained ECEs, although no research has comparatively evaluated this question in the BC context. This puts additional pressure on existing ECE workers to find, mentor and supervise new hires—who may move on to other opportunities as soon as they acquire the necessary skills.

### **Role clarity and advancement**

A related problem is the lack of clarity between employment roles for different levels of qualification. In many centres the tasks expected of employees are often the same regardless of their certification level or experience. Trained and untrained educators alike must split their time between working with children, and support tasks like preparing food and cleaning the centre.

This lack of role clarity feeds into a lack of options to progress careers within the childcare field. Once an ECE is qualified as an educator, they often continue to do the same work they did as an assistant. There are options to increase credentials by returning to school, but generally these fail to result in changes to job status or even level of pay. The one opportunity for progression is to advance into the role of a centre director—although as one interviewee remarked, ECEs are often thrust into these roles with little or no training at all in the completely separate administrative tasks required.

### **Small centre size**

Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of creating larger centres with sufficient administrative supports and staff. Smaller ECE centres face especially significant challenges for recruitment and retention: they typically lack administrative capacity to conduct hiring efficiently, and cannot achieve economies of scale to pay higher wages. One interviewee with decades of experience in designing and analyzing ECEC programs put it this way:

BC is the only place that [has small stand-alone programs] as a matter of course, so BC is the only place that gives a license for each individual room, so the default is you have an infant toddler centre of 12 children or 3-5 centre of 25 children. But I don't think it works at all to have these small centres, you need a critical mass of educators for peer support, for that level of supervision and direction<sup>4</sup>

According to the 2012 YBWSC survey, BC has the smallest average ECEC centre size of any province in Canada, with a median of 25 spaces per centre (FBV, 2013). A closer analysis shows that the small centre size applies to both urban and rural centres, with no statistically significant difference between the two<sup>5</sup>. This finding of predominantly small centre sizes is confirmed by MCFD's internal departmental data: According to a 2016 performance management report, 65% of ECEC licenses in BC include fewer than 40 spaces<sup>6</sup> (MCFD, 2016).

Small centre size compounds all of the other problems faced by educators: without other staff present, there is little opportunity for mentorship or staff support; employees are typically expected to take on administrative and support tasks, and are unable to focus on teaching needs of children. Multiple studies show that ongoing interactions and discussion between colleagues support the retention and overall satisfaction of employees, as well as improve overall service quality (Jovanovic, 2013).

In some cases, centres compensate for very small centre size by sharing administrative duties between multiple centres. In the YBWSC sample, 59% of respondents reported that their centre was one of several under the same owner (Author's custom tabulation).

<sup>4</sup> Interview, January 13 2017

<sup>5</sup> Author's custom tabulation

<sup>6</sup> In BC, childcare licenses are issued by age group, so in some cases, a single centre may possess multiple licenses. Unfortunately, this is not tracked in departmental reports.

#### **6.1.4. Summary of key research findings**

- ECEC recruitment and retention has been a problem for decades, but has been getting worse in recent years
- Primary causes include wages and benefits, and associated respect for the profession
- Presence of poor staff preparation and education, especially for assistants but also for some ECEs, is a source of stress for employees
- Changes in the education system have increased the overall opportunities for ECEs, but have resulted in an even greater drain of talent or qualified workers from the childcare field
- Lack of job clarity, weak career advancement, and poor role clarity are key factors for ECEs
- The high prevalence of small centres in BC contributes to major problems of poor administrative capacity in hiring, supporting and mentoring workers, and workplace stress

## **Chapter 7. Criteria and Measures**

### **7.1. Criteria:**

This section provides an explanation of the analytical framework used to evaluate different policy options for improving recruitment and retention of qualified ECEs. I have selected a set of criteria that are here described in order to enhance clarity, transparency, and rigor in the policy analysis. Making policy decisions is fundamentally an exercise in realistically assessing advantages and disadvantages, and making trade-offs between competing priorities. By applying the same criteria and measures to each option, we are better able to systematically assess these trade-offs, and to ultimately make better-informed decisions. After careful consideration, I have selected six criteria for this purpose: development, equity, cost, stakeholder support, public support and implementation complexity.

#### **7.1.1. Development**

The development criterion assesses how well a policy option supports the long-term development of children’s cognitive, social, and emotional well-being. This is measured through two aspects, presented as separate criteria:

1. Qualifications: expected increases in the proportion of ECEs with college-or university-level ECEC credentials working in BC ECEC centres, with preference given for increasing the proportion of two-year and higher diplomas, and
2. Retention: expected increases to the average job duration of qualified ECEs, as compared to current baselines.

Both educational level and retention length are particularly strongly associated with the ability of educators to produce high-quality educational experiences for children (Schilder, 2016). Retention in particular ensures the formation of secure attachment

relationships between children and educators, which has been shown to improve children's later outcomes in terms of cognitive and social development (Tran & Winsler, 2011). There is one exception: retention of less prepared, committed, or qualified educators may in fact be undesirable, and policy options that encourage turnover in this group may improve overall service quality (Park-Jadotte et al., 2004). This criterion therefore applies exclusively to retention of educators with a minimum ECE qualification in the workforce.

The analysis assesses the presence of key factors in sustaining the ECE workforce identified in the literature review and interviews, including: presence of workforce support (larger centres with enough staff and support staff); defined roles for staff of different types; presence of career progression attached to credentials; wage comparability to similar levels of education. Also evaluated is the degree to which the option is expected to increase the stature and public recognition of ECE as a profession. Data used to evaluate this criterion is drawn from empirical literature examining the impact of different policy measures on workplace conditions, interviews with ECEC experts, and published reports assessing the impacts of policies in other jurisdictions.

### **7.1.2. Equity**

The first equity criterion assesses whether options improve access to high-quality care for children of lower socio-economic status (SES). ECEC program quality tends to be lower in neighbourhoods with residents of lower SES, and in rural regions (Prentice, 2007). Equitable policies would improve availability of high-quality ECEC for children in underserved communities, and particularly for children at higher risk of developmental vulnerabilities. Of particular concern are rural communities and Indigenous children, who face systematic disadvantages in accessing sufficient, culturally appropriate educational resources.

A second equity criterion assesses affordability: this is the ability of lower-income parents to afford quality care, even if it is locally available. Affordability is a relative concept, and is typically assessed as a percentage of parental household income. Although figures attached to this vary, I assume that affordability falls under 5% the

purposes of this study, In this measure, impacts on affordability for lower-income parents are prioritized.

Important equity considerations are also implicitly captured by both the effectiveness and efficiency criteria. Gender equity in particular is a paramount factor in any discussion of ECEC. Women continue to undertake the vast majority of childrearing labour, and are disproportionately affected by the lack of high-quality ECEC services. Furthermore, low levels of ECEC compensation are themselves a gender equality issue, as these providers are disproportionately women, and low compensation represents in part a systematic social devaluing of what is considered “women’s work” (Ferns & Friendly, 2014). By increasing the availability of high-quality services, particularly for disadvantaged and lower income children, gender equality is supported. By improving ECE workplace conditions and attractiveness of working in the field, the two development criteria also inherently improve the stature of traditionally female care labour.

### **7.1.3. Cost to government**

The cost criterion assesses additional resources that government must expend to achieve the option, relative to current baseline expenditures. Estimates are made up of projections based on experiences of other jurisdictions, the current best information available about the BC context, and theoretical considerations. As limitations of this study did not permit comprehensive, specific costing of detailed implementation, cost estimates are made on an approximate, comparative basis.

### **7.1.4. Stakeholder support**

Stakeholder support evaluates the degree to which groups directly affected by the option are expected to support or oppose its implementation. Three groups are included in this assessment: ECE workers, ECE employers, and parents of young children. An un-weighted average of each group is taken, as the expected reactions of each group are of equal importance. In cases where the two groups conflict, these differences will be taken into account in the assessment. Where possible, this is

assessed using reports, media scans, and public statements released by representative groups; where data is unavailable, intuitive assessments are made.

#### **7.1.5. Political feasibility**

A policy option that is acceptable to decision-makers and has broad public support is more likely to be implemented. Policy options should also accord with the overall strategic direction and approaches taken by governments and decision makers. This criterion evaluates the likelihood of political support for a given option using a combination of interviews, survey data, and reactions from similar policies implemented in other jurisdictions as assessed by media reports. Where media reports are available on a specific policy, a variety of news sources are sampled and assessed on whether they report predominantly positive, neutral or negative mentions of the policy.

#### **7.1.6. Implementation complexity**

Implementation complexity evaluates the capacity of government to implement changes quickly, effectively, and without obstruction. This is assessed through the number of intergovernmental partners at federal or municipal levels, intra-governmental coordination or changes between departments, and legislative enactments required to make change. Implementation complexity is important to assess, as procedural aspects of coordination can result in long delays or complete obstruction of otherwise valid plans. This criterion is evaluated through the structure of the option, in terms of the parties it includes and changes it demands.

#### **7.1.7. Omitted criteria:**

A number of additional criteria were considered for the analysis, but are ultimately not included. In particular, cost measures do not assess the long-term returns expected from children's increased human capital. These returns can be reasonably expected from increases in labour-force participation, and decreased need for expenditures on other social services; several analyses have used cost-benefit estimates to assess these kinds of returns. While these returns contribute powerful

justifications for governments to invest in children, limitations of this study do not permit a numerical estimate of returns. Instead, qualitative assessments are used to assess the basic objective of improving children's outcomes. It is left up to future researchers to calculate dollar-value returns on children's well-being..

**Table 5. Criteria and measures summary**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Assessment methodology</b>
<b>Development: ECE Recruitment</b>	The total number of ECEs with post-secondary qualifications available to work in BC child care centres	Estimated increase in number of ECEs with post-secondary qualifications actively working or seeking employment in BC childcare. Priority is given to higher levels of education.	Estimates based on: Evidence from other jurisdictions, expert interviews
<b>Development: ECE Retention</b>	Qualified ECE worker length of employment	Change in average length of employment for ECE workers with higher levels of education and certification. (Higher is better).	Estimate based on: Literature, quantitative research evidence, expert interviews, theory
<b>Equity: Availability</b>	High-quality childcare is available to low SES and underserved communities	Expected increase in high-quality educators present in low-SES, under-served and rural communities	Estimate based on literature, quantitative research evidence, expert interviews
<b>Equity: Affordability</b>	Lower-income parents are able to afford high-quality care	Expected impact on cost of care as a proportion of income	Estimate based on literature, quantitative research evidence, expert interviews
<b>Stakeholder Support</b>	Level of directly affected stakeholder support for policy – includes ECEs and parents of young children	Estimated degree of ECE, employer and parent support for policy	Examples of similar policies implemented in other jurisdictions, with assessment through media scan of degree of resistance and negative reaction
<b>Political Feasibility</b>	General public support and alignment with overall policy strategies	Estimated degree of overall public support, alignment of policy with existing policy frameworks	Media scan & surveys
<b>Cost</b>	Government expenditures to implement and maintain policy	Increase in government expenditures relative to current baseline	Literature and cross-jurisdictional comparison of similar program costs.
<b>Implementation Complexity</b>	BC's ability to implement and control policy	Number of partners required to implement policy & likelihood of partnership	Expert interviews, evidence from other jurisdictions, public statements from partners

## **Chapter 8. Policy Options Analysis**

### **8.1. Assumptions and ranking**

This section presents a set of policy options able to directly address the objective of improving the recruitment and retention of qualified, high quality educators in Early Childhood Education. Each option is described and systematically analyzed according to the set of criteria described above. For each criterion, I assign a value of high, medium and low, based on how well the option performs. These are provided on a comparative basis intended as brief summaries to highlight key points, not as replacements for the full analysis.

### **8.2. Option 1: Wage and benefit incentives**

In this option, childcare centres are subsidized at higher rates for employing more registered ECE providers through the existing Child Care Operating Funding mechanism. This option includes requirements for employers to supplement employee benefits up to 17% of wages.

The targeted wage and benefits model is based on Ontario's Provincial Wage Enhancement initiative implemented in 2015, with some modifications. While Ontario model provided supplements to employers of \$2/hour for every educator regardless of qualifications, the BC version would offer higher subsidy rates with higher qualifications. Additionally, employers opting in to the incentives would be required to extend 17% employee pension and health benefits.

Although this structure encourages employers to enhance pay for better qualified educators, employers remain free to set wages for employees as they see fit. Consequently, the wage supplements primarily act as both an incentive for employers to

hire and retain more qualified employees, and an adaptable tool to accomplish this end. Employers seeking to improve their own recruitment and retention practices are not constrained to doing so by wages alone; they may also use the subsidies to reduce their labour costs or supplement other workplace supports such as vacation rates, training benefits, hiring support staff, and so on. In this manner, it provides a high degree of latitude for local, community-based decisions on using funds, while still directly incentivizing the hiring of qualified employees.

Benefits are, however, a mandated part of funding under this option. Extended benefits such as pension and health plans are often more important than wages in ensuring a sense of long-term financial security for employees (Totenhagen et al, 2016). As only a minority of BC's ECEC centres provide employees with extended benefits (FBV, 2013), mandated benefits ensures a higher degree of overall employment stability.

### **Policy analysis**

Incentive-based approaches to improving ECE qualification are a widely used intervention, and have had positive effects on improving ECE qualification levels in American state programs (Schilder, 2016; Totenhagen et al, 2016). In surveys, ECEs consistently rate low wages and lack of benefits as the least satisfying part of their job (Doherty et al, 2000). Benefit enhancements particularly support long-term financial security and sector retention. Increasing wages by qualification level also contributes and the presence of a career ladder for advancement within the childcare sector, although this may be diminished if employers may choose to direct some of this subsidy to other aspects of programming.

With higher rates of government subsidy, incentives reduce operating costs for centres, which should decrease fees, although these effects would mostly depend on the size of subsidies. As this option allows for targeting additional wage supplements to underserved communities, it partially meets the geographic equity criteria, with some caveats. First, it is difficult to design criteria to capture genuinely higher-need communities. There is a risk of funds being directed primarily towards larger centres that are less in need of funds to begin with, as they are more easily able to support and employ larger numbers of qualified ECEs. Critics of incentives point out that private

providers may simply use these incentives as a way to reduce their own labour costs and redirect funds towards profits without altering their employment practices (Waddoups, 2006). This is particularly a risk in a market like childcare, where there are few providers, resulting in little competition (Paull, 2014). Mitigating this risk would require careful design of criteria for wage supplements to better target higher-need centres.

Wage supplements are quite costly. There is insufficient data to conduct a full costing, but as a rough example: supplements of \$2/hour would cost \$4160 per educator, assuming full-time work. If all 16,072 eligible ECEs receive this amount, it would result in costs of \$66.9 million; benefits of 17%, assuming an \$18/hour base, would run another \$102 million. Together, these options would nearly double the present expenditures on ECEC.

Ontario media reporting on the program indicated a generally widespread support. Although political decision makers are likely to balk at higher costs, the option aligns with the government’s basic strategy. Reactions amongst ECEs, parents, and employers have been favourable to similar incentive programs in Ontario.

**Table 6. Summary evaluation of Option 1: Wage and benefit incentives**

Criterion	Evaluation
Qualifications	High – Compensation improves with credentials, and empirical evidence of success (Schilder, 2016; Totenhagen et al, 2016)
Retention	High – Higher wages and benefits are expected to improve retention
Equity - Access	Medium – Some concerns of fund misuse by private centres (Waddoups, 2006)
Equity - Affordability	Medium – Decreases operating costs, likely to somewhat decrease parent costs
Cost	Low – Significant, ongoing costs to government to supplement wages
Stakeholder Support	High – Based on positive reactions to similar programs in Ontario
Political Feasibility	Medium – Some political resistance to high costs, but evidence of public support
Implementation	High – Some negotiation required, but can be implemented within existing funding mechanism

### 8.3. Option 2: Wage scale

In this option, MCFD would implement province-wide wage scales for educators in childcare centres, with pay increasing with higher educational attainment. Centres opting into the designation would receive higher funding, and in return would be required to meet enhanced staffing requirements.

The crucial difference between wage scales and wage incentives is the requirement placed on employers to pay staff according to pre-determined rates, rather than having the latitude to pay as they see fit. Wage scales place the onus on government to negotiate with educators to determine appropriate levels of compensation for ECEs. As shown in Figure 1 above, wages earned by ECEs in BC are below the average earnings for others of similar education levels, and less than half those of teachers, contributing substantially to sector turnover in ECE. Wage scales would close a portion of this gap, and provide more predictable earning rates for ECEs seeking to enter the field. Similar to the incentives option, this would include requirements to pay pension and health benefits for all workers. Although further engagement should be undertaken before finalizing the categories, a sample scale is included below.

**Table 7. Sample wage scale**

<b>Levels:</b>	<b>Qualification Level</b>
Level 1	ECEA/Support staff – (1 course)
Level 2	ECE 10 month + 500 hour' training
Level 3	ECEs with 5 + years' experience, Infant/Toddler, Special Needs diploma
Level 4	Senior ECEs (10+ years' experience) ECEs with diploma or higher + 2 years' experience
Level 5	Managers with ECE + ECE Director diploma, Employees with Bachelor's of ECE

Example grid is based on models proposed in Flanagan (2009) and the BCACCS (2014)

Distinct tiers allow for clearly acknowledging and compensating different roles, experience and qualification levels. This particular example adds new levels to the basic training, recognizing more experience, and management roles. Specific compensation rates would require much greater engagement with providers and educators, but one

approach may be to set average wage earnings for individuals with equivalent levels of education in BC: for certificates or diplomas in BC, this would result in wages of \$24.80/hour, approximately seven dollars per hour more than the current average for educators and assistants<sup>1</sup>.

## **Policy analysis**

Setting wage scales tied to credential attainment addresses several key issues identified in interviews. First, it clearly defines a career path for new ECEs entering the field, tying distinct wage increases to education and experience. Second, creating a designation of “early learning centres” clarifies the educational intent of these centres, and sends a strong message of recognizing value in the work done by ECEs. Multi-study assessments and evaluations on worker retention in the American context affirm that higher wages and benefits such as pension and health care, and other aspects are associated with improved worker recruitment and longer employment duration both in a workplace and within the ECEC field (Totenhagen et al., 2016; Park-Jadotte et al, 2004). Providing workers considering a career in ECE with clear wage expectations and career trajectories is also expected to improve overall recruitment into the profession. By reducing reliance on ECE Assistants, ECEs in smaller workplaces would experience improved collegial mentorship and staff co-support.

Prince Edward Island recently implemented a similar model of Early Years Centres with wage scales for ECEs working in designated centres, with apparent success: in a survey following shortly after the reform, no ECEs reported plans of leaving their jobs in the following year. By contrast, in the same survey 20% of BC’s ECEs reported planning to leave their jobs (FBV, 2013). In an interview, Dr. Kathleen Flanagan, a consultant primarily responsible for designing the PEI plan, highlighted the role it played in affirming ECE as a valued, well-supported system.

By increasing the overall recruitment into the profession, equity of access to ECEC is improved, but additional strategies are needed to ensure benefits are shared

<sup>1</sup> Kershaw et al, (2009), for example, argues for this approach

equally among centers. A noted challenge in implementing wage grids is accounting for regional differences in cost of living (BCACCS, 2014). If equal wages are offered across all regions and centres, this may have the unintended consequence of drawing ECEs out of higher-need centres and into programs in lower cost-of-living areas, replicating or potentially worsening current service equity. If implemented, this option should include carefully designed accommodations for more difficult-to-staff centres. With higher rates of government subsidy, this option also involves a decrease in operating costs for centres, which should contribute to some reduction in fees.

The largest drawbacks to this option, however, are the high cost and low political feasibility. Negotiating wage scales is expected to result in substantial increases in cost relative to the current status quo. As a rough estimate, an increase of \$7/hour for every ECEC would run \$234M, and benefits another \$142M. Political decision makers in BC tend to see this type of option as expanding the government's public management role, and view entry into long-term commitments with caution. BC governments have a long history of fraught relationships with teacher's unions. They will almost certainly be wary of entering into negotiations with ECEs if it might mean similar protracted battles over wages, and facing the potential of spiralling costs in the future. Public support has been high in areas such as PEI, but if costs are seen as significant, some resistance is expected.

Wage scales are also challenging to implement. Although BC retains the authority to implement this rule, there are major hurdles to incorporating a singular pay structure into BC's highly heterogeneous administration and management of childcare. MCFD would also have to alter its funding structure substantially, and take a much more active role in monitoring and enforcing oversight of centre operations.

Strong stakeholder support is expected among both ECEs and parents: ECE advocacy organizations such as ECEBC have long argued for the implementation of wage grids, and worker consultations have confirmed this support (BCACCS, 2014). Some employers, however, may be less supportive of rigid requirements, and especially so if they face barriers to meeting enhanced staffing requirements.

**Table 8. Summary evaluation of Option 2: Wage scale**

Criteria	Evaluation
Qualifications	High –compensation improves with credentials
Retention	High – Establishes career ladder, pay and benefits
Equity - Access	Medium – Equal pay scale means benefits will be widely distributed, not focused in high-need areas
Equity - Affordability	Medium – Decreases operating costs, likely to somewhat decrease fees
Cost	Low - Significant, ongoing costs to government to supplement wages
Stakeholder Support	High – Based on advocacy for wage increases
Political Feasibility	Low – significant concerns of upward cost spiraling
Implementation	Low –negotiation with multiple partners to implement

## 8.4. Option 3: Workplace training programs

Option: Increase the availability of a workplace-training program and professional development leading to higher credentials.

It is important that ECEs be able to advance credentials while working, and if possible, to do so while remaining in their home communities. The primary component of this option is based on The Early Childhood Education Workplace Training Program (WTP) operating in Manitoba since 2002. The Manitoba Workplace Training Program permits students to obtain diploma-level ECE certification by attending class for two days per week, while continuing to work in a licensed ECEC program and earning their full weekly salary. The Ministry funds the cost of a substitute educator for the two-days per week, while the student is responsible for covering the cost of tuition. Implementing the WTP would require partnering with post-secondary institutions to adapt and develop programs that fit the two-day per week schedule. To be eligible, students would require a minimum of two years' experience working in an ECEC setting.

The WTP permits students to continue to both earn their full income and maintain a regular weekly schedule while attending classes, reducing both financial and scheduling barriers to upgrading education. It also allows students to immediately apply lessons learned in the classroom to their workplace environment, building in a component of practical experience that interviewees identified may be lacking from some diploma programs.

Workplace-based training programs have proven popular in recent years for front line health care workers, who bear strong similarities to the ECE workforce: low pay, low educational threshold for entry, high stress and, consequently, high turnover (Dill Chuang & Morgan [DCM], 2014). These healthcare-based programs often mesh professional development, on-the-job training, and classroom learning to give employees the opportunity to increase their qualification levels while maintaining their regular jobs. Such programs have often proven effective in improving worker retention, although they perform best when strong partnerships are formed with educational institutions, and clear leaders are appointed from both educational institutions and employers, with clear implementation policy (DCM, 2014).

### **Policy analysis**

There is consistent evidence that government-sponsored support for continued professional development in the workplace can assist in advancing the baseline certification level of workers (Totenhagen et al., 2016, Bridges et al, 2011). This appears especially true when these initiatives are sustained over time (Park-Jadotte et al, 2004). The WTP would be primarily effective in upgrading training of educators already working in ECE as assistants, responsible adults, or ECEs seeking to upgrade to diploma-level training. The program also provides a recruitment tool for educators wishing to enter into the ECE profession, but facing financial barriers to leaving the workforce for full-time school. As it does not increase wages, however, it would be unlikely to raise the number of educators taking higher-level two-year or bachelor degree programs.

Although some sources argue worker employment programs support retention, (Jovanovic, 2013), it provides no improved pay, stability, or workplace support. A report commissioned by the Manitoba Government notes of the program “there is a very high

satisfaction rate among graduates and those who complete tend to remain in their jobs” (Flanagan & Beach, 2016, P. 67). However, there is a possibility that some of this effect is due to selection effect for already dedicated workers into these programs; to date, studies have not been able to adequately account for this limitation (Bridges et al, 2011).

Workplace training would have no effect on affordability: program funds would simply sustain operations as ECEs attend school. However, availability of trained ECEs would be expected to improve in rural, harder-to-staff communities. Interviewees identified that a challenge in rural programs is ECEs having to leave their communities to earn degrees; those that do leave, usually do not return. The WTP could support students continuing to live and work in their home communities, but receiving training at the same time, particularly if distance education options are included. Research indicates that low-income students consider local, socially comfortable program offerings more important than direct financial inducements (Harrison & Hatt, 2012). Implementation would be strongest if it leveraged this fact, ensuring institutions with locations in under-served and rural areas were targeted for the initial roll-out.

The WTP program performs fairly well along most governmental objectives. Program costs are moderate relative to options 1 and 2: government outlays would be restricted only to those advancing credentials, rather than covering the entire workforce. In Manitoba, employers and students have been highly supportive of the program (Flanagan & Beach, 2016), and BC would likely be similar. Political feasibility raises no concerns, as it makes no major change to government involvement, and is likely to elicit positive or neutral response from the public. There would be some complexity in developing new ECE education programs to adapt to the new schedules, requiring effective partnerships with post-secondary institutions.

**Table 9. Summary evaluation of Option 3: Workplace training program**

Criterion	Evaluation
Qualifications	High – Advances baseline certification, evidence of success (Totenhagen et al., 2016, Bridges et al, 2011).
Retention	Low – No pay increase or stability –may only select for already committed workers (Bridges et al, 2011)
Equity - Availability	Medium – Supports keeping ECEs in home communities, but does not significantly quality in underserved communities
Equity - Affordability	Low – Does not affect care affordability.
Cost	Medium – Significant costs, but only for a small number of educators
Stakeholder Support	High – Based on positive reactions to Manitoba program (Flanagan & Beach, 2016)
Political Feasibility	Medium – Requires new direction for government, public benefits not as clear
Implementation	Medium – Within purview of provincial government, but requires significant cross-ministerial collaboration

## 8.5. Option 4: Targeted centres and subsidies

This option entails creating a new childcare centre designation focused on delivering high-quality services in communities of low-SES. This is paired with increased, income-targeted subsidies for families who enrol children in the designated centres.

Targeted Centres would be intended as a community hub for services provided to young children, providing intensive, high-quality education in higher need areas. Existing ECEC centres in eligible communities would apply for the designation, and be expected to meet criteria within 2-3 years. Requirements would include:

- Maintaining a minimum number of spaces, including infant/toddler and 3-5 year old age ranges;
- higher wages for ECEC staff, increasing by qualification level; and
- Priority placed on enrolling children at higher risk of developmental vulnerabilities.

In exchange for meeting these requirements, centres would receive increased funding from the base CCOF funding. Short-term implementation should focus on communities with fewer services and higher levels of developmental vulnerability. Some licensing exceptions to the size restriction could be allowed in rural areas, where there would be challenges in meeting minimum spaces, even at lower costs. BC began implementing a different version of this program (Early Learning Centres) in 2013, focussing on integrating information and access to multiple services for the whole child. Thus far, however, these do not typically include childcare services. This option builds on this existing model, with additional requirements and funding.

### **Policy analysis**

The targeted centre option is intended to serve the needs of disadvantaged children, directly connecting qualified educators with children in under-served communities, and decreasing the cost of high-quality care for lower-income parents who attend. It would be challenging, however, for many rural areas to meet requirements for increased centre-sizes, due to smaller, spread-out populations potentially unable to access a centralized hub. In a similar program, PEI permitted licensing variances exempting rural centres from minimum size requirements, but doing so would mean reducing some of the benefits from better staff support.

Targeted Centres are expected to improve recruitment and retention of qualified educators by improving workplace support, increasing administrative capacity, adequately funding centres to provide role clarity, and increasing compensation for workers within the centres. This option addresses the significant challenge of professional isolation faced by workers in small centres, by increasing centre size. Because it involves implementation only in some communities, however, it will have only a limited effect on overall workforce recruitment and retention. There is also a risk that by offering higher wages than other centres, this option will simply attract the best-qualified workers from other program. The extent of this effectiveness overall therefore depends on the extent of the program roll-out; effects of displacement can be mitigated either by a wide use of this model, or pairing this with wage supports in other centres.

Although the option improves affordability through the demand-side subsidies, there is substantial evidence that in areas with low availability of childcare, these types of supports have little effect lower-income families' use of formal (outside the home) childcare (Farfan-Portet et al., 2011). To maximize access for lower-income children, the option must also directly facilitate the creation of more centres in lower-income communities, through pairing capital funds prioritizing lower-SES communities. Furthermore, this option does nothing to improve quality for lower-income or developmentally vulnerable children accessing services in other centres.

ECEs and parents involved in the programs would likely support this option, but if centres displace existing programs, they would garner some negative reactions from parents and employers. Although MCFD is able to initiate these changes directly without legislative change, implementation requires considerable coordination with different municipalities, non-profit associations, as well as other front-line services; these hurdles presented considerable challenges when initially implemented in the UK (Lewis, Cuthbert & Sarre, 2011).

**Table 10. Summary evaluation of Option 4: Targeted centres**

Criterion	Evaluation
Qualifications	Medium – improves pay, includes higher qualifications, but only for centres in program
Retention	Medium – Improves administrative support and pay, but only for centres in program
Equity - Availability	High – Substantially improves access in low-income communities
Equity - Affordability	High – Lower-cost access to centers, subsidized children prioritized
Cost	Medium – Significant costs, but only for a limited number of centres
Stakeholder Support	Medium – Some support, but may displace some existing centres
Political Feasibility	High – Consistent with existing strategies, publicly supported in UK
Implementation	Medium –requires significant collaboration from communities and existing centres

## 8.6. Overview of policy options

Each option clearly has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. 105: Policy options comparison Matrix summarizes the assessment above, permitting a snapshot of performance along criteria and an assessment of the various trade-offs. The simple rating of high, medium or low provides a helpful overview, but should not be taken as a substitute for the full discussion above.

**Table 11: Policy options comparison matrix**

Criterion	Options			
	1. Incentives	2. Wage scales	3. Workplace Training Program	4. Targeted Centres
Qualifications	High	High	High	Medium
Retention	High	High	Low	Medium
Equity – Community	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Equity- Affordability	Medium	Medium	Low	High
Cost	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Stakeholder Support	High	High	High	Medium
Political Feasibility	Medium	Low	Medium	High
Implementation	High	Low	Medium	Medium

## **Chapter 9. Recommendations and Implementation**

### **9.1. Policy option recommendation**

Based on the systematic analysis of policy criteria, this study recommends the implementation of:

- Option 1: Incentives for centres employing ECEs with higher levels of qualifications

Introducing incentives directly targets the most crucial elements of supporting high-quality worker recruitment and retention. Workers are rewarded for enhanced qualifications, resulting to more defined career path, and benefits and stable pay result in substantially improved retention. Incentives have been proven to increase qualifications and recruitment into the field overall (Totenhagen et al, 2016), and can be designed to give higher-needs areas more focussed benefits, and ensure that high-quality services are made available to those who need them most. Parents, employers, and ECEs are all likely to welcome the increased compensation, and resulting increase in centre quality.

The research conducted for this study suggested that recruitment pressures are reaching a crisis point. Because the option is relatively politically feasible and easily implemented, it allows government to immediately begin addressing the most pressing problems in the field. It has the added advantage of retaining a high latitude of employer and community control over the best use of funds, mitigating the problems of a one-size-fits-all, top-down approach. That said, it is crucial that subsidies be set at a sufficient rate for adequate employee compensation. Finally, communities or regions may choose to direct these subsidies toward establishing their own wage scales.

There is no question that the option comes with high costs, but these pale in comparison to expenditures on full-day kindergarten, or later interventions in public

school. At least some of the expenditures will also be recouped in the long run, although it is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of this type.

## **9.2. Implementation and further considerations:**

### **9.2.1. Targets and data gathering**

Implementation of recruitment and retention programs have often struggled initially due to a dearth of initial information on their target populations, presenting barriers to either costing or evaluation of programs (Park-Jadotte et al, 2004). The first step to ensuring successful implementation is establishing a clear baseline of information on the current workforce, followed by establishing clear targets and methods of measuring outcomes.

CCOF already carries reporting requirements that include staff characteristics and qualifications, but these are neither tracked nor retrievable on a systematic basis. A simple first step would be consolidating this data and including it in departmental performance reports, to track ongoing staff qualification issues. To monitor retention, a single question added to CCOF could track turnover levels, allowing for ongoing evaluation and adjustment to policies.

### **9.2.2. Community engagement**

A design and implementation committee should be established early, with representation from educators and employers from several regions and sectors. Although other jurisdictions such as PEI have implemented such measures in short timeframes, BC has a much more complex set of delivery mechanisms, and services facing different circumstances. Early engagement and clear communication reduces the likelihood of unintended consequences.

### **9.2.3. Cross-ministerial collaboration**

The lack of a systemic approach to early years service delivery across education, health and ECEC represents a major shortcoming in the current paradigm of government management. When instituting incentives, careful consideration should be given to the effects of wages from programs across different sectors. Incentives must be set at a sufficiently high rate to stem the bleeding of high-quality educators into education, and instead build towards a cross-ministerial strategy for workforce development. Province-wide changes to how educators are compensated represents a significant opportunity for re-orienting thinking in how human resources are valued and treated across the spectrum of early years services.

### **9.2.4. Longer-term considerations**

While this analysis focuses on recommending one option as a first priority, this option is not mutually exclusive from the others. Incentives-based approaches could be treated as a stepping-stone toward wage scales, as more data is gathered, and complications in implementation are ironed out. The incentives approach would particularly benefit from being paired with Option 4: Targeted centres and parent subsidies. The main downside of targeted centres is its limited scope, resulting in little effect on the overall workforce. By contrast, incentives address the overall workforce, but are difficult to design in a way that actually results in more equitable access for lower-SES communities. Combining the province-wide effects of incentives with targeted benefits for lower-SES communities would therefore address weaknesses in both options.

## Chapter 10. Conclusion

There is a glaring absence of information collected, reported or disseminated on BC's early childhood workforce, pointing to a troubling lack of interest or commitment in maintaining, much less improving standards. With growing calls for more affordable, available care in the province, clear strategies must be deployed to ensure that the pressure to maintain low costs does not diminish the quality of care.

This is not a simple problem. Though adequate wages may be a precondition to sustaining a high-quality workforce, this study has highlighted a much more complex situation. Solutions must take into account not only material incentives, but also the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of educators. Of particular importance are how society perceives and portrays the various types of early childhood education, and how both current educators and potential candidates construct a sense of personal and professional identity through their work.

I would like to conclude with a word of caution. A limitation on focusing predominantly on qualification levels, as I have done, is to equate early childhood education with school-based formal types of education. Although improving educational outcomes is a laudable goal, it is important to recall that quality in ECEC is a fluid concept that fluctuates between societies, and over time, as our understanding of children's development changes (OECD, 2011). Scholarship on the social determinants of health cautions against framing benefits of early childhood services entirely within the paradigm of children's educational attainment. These concepts are helpful, but tend to reduce children's outcomes into simplified understandings of children's future economic productivity. Room must be left for developing a broad ethical understanding of wellbeing and development in the early years, and for an evolving, open attitude to the role that early childhood educators play in the lives of children, parents, and communities.

Future research will surely bring new lessons on the environments, practices and activities that allow children to learn and grow to their fullest potential. Nevertheless, there are some things that we can state with certainty. The early years are important to long-term development. An increasing number of parents require out-of-home care, even as their ability to pay for care diminishes. As our attitudes and understanding evolves, we will need a stable workforce of committed, qualified educators to adapt, learn, and apply these lessons. Despite the unknowns, investing in the workforce today is a robust strategy for the future.

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## Appendix A.

### West Coast Childcare Resource Centre job listings

Data is drawn from a complete set of job listings between 2010-2016. All analysis performed by the author.

**Table A1. Change in listings by type of childcare 2014-16**

Care type	2014	2015	2016	% change 2014-16	Total 2014-16	% of total
Infant/Toddler	59	93	85	44%	328	21%
3 to 5 Years	90	103	135	50%	237	29%
Preschool	61	60	75	23%	181	18%
School Age	44	58	70	59%	196	15%
Other	45	60	76	69%	172	16%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>1114</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table A2. Job listings by qualifications required: 2014-2016**

Qualifications required	2014	2015	2016	% change 2014-16	Total 2014-16	% of total
Basic ECE	178	216	287	61%	681	61%
Post Basic ECE	64	80	63	-2%	207	19%
School Age Certificate	22	40	43	95%	105	9%
Other	35	38	48	37%	121	11%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>1114</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table A3. Job listings by care type 2010-2016**

Care type	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Grand Total
3 to 5 Years	103	66	76	71	90	103	132	641
Infant/Toddler	86	61	61	67	59	93	84	511
Other	73	66	80	33	45	60	70	427
Preschool	79	62	61	51	61	60	71	446
School Age	45	34	54	53	44	58	69	357
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>2382</b>

**Table A4. Job listings by certifications required 2010-2016**

<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>Basic ECE</b>	225	168	167	139	178	216	277	1370
<b>Post Basic ECE</b>	100	71	83	75	64	80	63	536
<b>School Age Certificate</b>	23	20	35	33	22	40	42	215
<b>Other</b>	38	30	47	28	35	38	44	260
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>2382</b>

## Appendix B.

### Profile of BC's ECE workforce and Educational institutions

The number of early childhood educators and assistants is growing, despite turnover. Between April 2015 and March 2016, there were 2,039 new ECE certifications and 1,424 new ECE Assistant certifications in BC. These are a combination of ECEs trained in BC, and educators with equivalent credentials from other provinces receiving certification in BC. As of January 12, 2017, BC's Early Childhood Educator registry reported 16,072 registered ECEs, and 6,123 registered ECE Assistants. Of the registered ECEs, 3,123 have special needs certificates, and 4,567 have Infant/Toddler certificates (MCFD email communication, Jan. 12, 2017). It is not known how many of these are actively working in the registered childcare sector, as this information is not tracked by MCFD.

According to 2014 Labour Force Survey data, median wages for the early childhood educators and assistant category were \$16; this remains consistent across all BC regions:

**Table C-1. Hourly Wages of Early Childhood Educators and Assistants by BC Region:**

Region:	Low	Median	High
<b>British Columbia</b>	11	16	24
<b>Cariboo Region</b>	11	16	24
<b>Kootenay Region</b>	13.4	16	20
<b>Lower Mainland - Southwest Region</b>	11	16	24.84
<b>Nechako Region</b>	12	15.75	22.57
<b>North Coast Region</b>	11	16	24
<b>Northeast Region</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Thompson--Okanagan Region</b>	12.5	15.5	21.42
<b>Vancouver Island and Coast Region</b>	12.5	16	24

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2014

Statistics Canada reports very little data publicly on ECEs, but some limited information is available from the 2011 National Household Survey on education level, age, and gender under the National Occupational Category (NOC) 4214: Early Childhood Educators and Assistants. In brief: Centre-based ECEs and Assistants predominantly hold diplomas or certificates, and are slightly less likely than the overall population to hold a bachelor's degree. Family-based care providers are overall less educated: this group is less likely to hold a diploma or certificate, and much more likely to have never graduated from high school. Table 3 below compares educational levels of centre-based ECEs, family childcare providers, and the BC overall labour force for purposes of comparison.

**Table C-2. Educational Attainment of BC ECEs (2011)**

Category	Total number:	Highest Educational Attainment			
		Below High school	High School	Diploma or certificate	Bachelor's Degree or higher
Early Childhood Educators and Assistants	21,010	7%	21%	55%	18%
Family childcare Providers	14,230	21%	26%	35%	19%
BC Overall Labour Force	3,646,840	17%	28%	34%	22%

Note: Adapted from 2011 NHS data table, catalogue number 99-012-X2011056.

In addition, BC's ECE workforce is aging. According to the 2011 NHS, BC has the largest proportion of early childhood educators over 45 of any province in Canada, at 36% of the total workforce. This represents a particular challenge in ECE recruitment: as workers increasingly retire and leave the field, increasing strain will be placed on a younger, inexperienced workforce.

**Post-secondary institutional analysis:**

In total, 32 institutions are presently certified to provide ECE certificate training for BC. Of these, 18 are public institutions, 11 private colleges, 2 are adult education facilities, and 1 is a distance education only program provided from out-of-province by the University of Lethbridge. Table C-3 below summarizes programs offered by

institution type. While most provide infant/toddler and Special Needs certificates, only 5 provide Aboriginal focussed curriculum options.

**Table C-3. BC Post-Secondary ECE program types**

Institution type	TOTAL offering ECE Certificate	Sub-Programs offered:			
		Infant/Toddler	Special Needs	ECE Distance	Aboriginal Focus
Public	18	17	17	4	4
Private	11	9	7	1	1
Adult education	2	2	2	-	-
Distance only	1	-	-	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

Note: Adapted from Government of British Columbia, 2017

The large number of private colleges providing ECE training is unusual in Canada. Several interviewees for this project raised concerns about differences in quality among educational programs, and particularly about low-quality programs from private institutions. As no BC, this is a subject worthy of further investigation.

## Appendix C.

### Sample participant consent form

Hello,

My name is Scott Carlson, and I am a student in the Masters of Public Policy program at Simon Fraser University. I am writing a major research paper titled: *Room to Grow: Policy Options for the Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators in BC*. The objective of my paper is to identify the key issues surrounding the workplaces conditions, recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, and develop a set of practical policy options and recommendations to address them. The final paper will be published publicly in Simon Fraser University's Library.

I am interested in learning about your knowledge and insights regarding this topic. I would like to interview you either by telephone or in person at a time that is convenient for you.

You are free to seek approval from your employer or association prior to speaking to me, but you are not required to do so. However, if you choose to participate without seeking approval, you do so at your own risk.

I will make every effort I can to protect your confidentiality. I will not use your name, workplace, or title in my report unless I have your specific consent to do so. I will be audio-recording your interview, which will be used only for notes only. Only I will have access to audio recordings, which will be stored on a password-protected laptop, and will be destroyed by the completion of this study. I do intend to use some direct comments and quotes in the body of the report. s. If you are consenting to having your name or job information included in this study and would like to review quotes attributed to you, please either let me know during this interview or contact me by email at [REDACTED]@sfu.ca, and I will provide you with a copy prior to publication. If you disagree with any quotes, I will either remove or modify them.

You can request to stop the interview at any time. You can also retract any statements or withdraw your participation in the study at any time. If you would like to retract a statement, or would like to withdraw your participation after the interview, you can email me directly at [REDACTED]@sfu.ca, and I will destroy the record

After the initial interview, I may contact you with some follow-up questions within 6 months. There will be no additional contact for the purposes of the study after that time. Please let me know if you would like a copy of the research results, and I will send you a copy of the completed project.

Do you consent to having your job title, organization or name used when referencing your comments and/or direct quotes while participating in an interview shared in the study titled: *Room to Grow: Policy Options for the Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators in BC*

Please check all information that you consent to having shared in this report:

Job title \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ None of these: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consent to participate in an interview for the study titled: *Room to Grow: Policy Options for the Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators in BC*

**Please check one:**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ of  
Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signed \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any complaints or questions, you can direct them to:

Dr. Jeff Toward - Director, Office of Research Ethics

██████████@sfu.ca; 778-██████████

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Or my Capstone supervisor:

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Thank you, and I look forward to speaking with you.

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## **Appendix D.**

### **Sample interview schedule**

#### **Research Problem**

Two factors have been consistently identified as crucial contributors to high-quality early childhood education and care: well-qualified early childhood educators, and consistency of educators in children's life. Yet, every province in Canada reports challenges in the recruitment and retention of qualified ECE personnel. These workforce challenges negatively impact children by depriving them of vital educational resources at a crucial time in early childhood development.

#### **Purpose and method of interview**

The purpose of the interview is to learn about policy strategies that may be effective in addressing the most pressing issues in terms of workplace conditions, recruitment and retention of early childhood educators in BC. I will be asking open-ended questions, with some natural follow-up questions and discussion of the topics. There are no right or wrong answers to the topics we will be discussing. I am just looking for your personal perspective and will be pleased with whatever information you provide me with.

#### **Topic Areas of Discussion**

- Opinions on ECEC generally: affordability, availability, and quality in BC
- Knowledge of the scale, nature, and impact of issues of ECEC recruitment and retention in BC
- Opinions on reasons behind ECEC recruitment and retention issues
- Knowledge of what data is collected regarding ECE recruitment and retention, opinions on data collection strategies that would be helpful in the future
- Current and past actions taken by your organization/government body to address ECE recruitment and retention
- Current and past actions of other organisations/government bodies to address ECE recruitment and retention
- Challenges of implementing changes affecting recruitment and retention
- Opinions on ECEC policies used in other jurisdictions
- Ideas, suggestions, or thoughts on potential policy options for BC
- Thoughts on other considerations not yet discussed
- Suggestions for other persons to contact in regards to these issues.