



# The Supporting Employers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project: Preliminary Findings

Child Care Human Resources Sector Council

## October 2008

Employers—including administrators, managers, executive directors, and boards of directors—are a key target audience for addressing the human resource challenges facing the ECEC workforce. Yet Canada's ECEC sector is diverse with no consistent national policy and approach. As a result, the context in which employers work varies by province and territory. In addition, employers operate in a wide range of governance models and employment settings. Each of these factors contributes to a lack of definition and information about who ECEC employers are, the range of employers' human resources needs, and how those needs can best be met.

This paper contains summary data and highlights from the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council's **Supporting Employers in ECEC** project. Funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, the project seeks to *clearly define the range of employer governance models in Canada's early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector* and *identify the human resource needs of employers by model*.

The **Supporting Employers in ECEC Project** began in June 2007. The final project report and related documents will be released in January 2009.

## Project Objectives

The primary objectives of the **Supporting Employers in ECEC** project are to:

- Define the range and type of employer governance models in Canada's early childhood education and care sector;
- Document the human resources (HR) needs of employers in different regulated settings and contexts;
- Determine employers' perspectives on how best to address human resource issues in the sector, documenting innovative practices or tools that already exist;
- Identify and prioritize solutions that could help employers address human resource issues.

## Project Activities – Status

- Employer Survey – Complete.
- Employer Focus Groups – Complete.
- Mixed stakeholder focus groups<sup>1</sup> – Complete.
- Key Informant interviews – Complete.
- Literature Review Report – Under development. This report provides a full discussion of the key trends and issues affecting human resources in the child care sector.
- Governance/Employer Model Profiles – Under Development. This report will define each of the governance/employer models identified during the research process.
- Mapping of HR Issues – Under Development. This report will identify the range of governance/ employer models, the size/scope of operations, and the associated human resources issues of employers in each province/territory.
- Final Report – Under development. This comprehensive report will contain an in-depth analysis of all project research, recommendations, and next steps.

## Project Participants

- Child Care Human Resources Sector Council
- Supporting Employers Project Steering Committee
- ECEC Employers from a range of models, including: for-profit and non-profit organizations, Aboriginal organizations, community organizations, worksite/private companies, public institution (hospital, university), and government organizations.
- Representatives of provincial/territorial/federal government departments responsible for early childhood education and care
- Representatives of provincial/territorial/pan-Canadian child care and labour organizations
- Trainers delivering post-secondary programs in early childhood education

<sup>1</sup> Mixed stakeholders include representatives from municipal/provincial/territorial government, educational institutions, child care organizations, labour organizations and Aboriginal organizations.

# Introduction

Research for the *Supporting Employers in Canada's ECEC Sector Project* was conducted in order to gain an understanding of:

- the range and type of ECEC employer governance models;
- the human resource needs associated with each model, and
- the type of tools and resources that employers need to work effectively and address human resource issues.

The purpose of this document is to share preliminary research findings, including:

- Results of the Employer Survey (987 respondents)
- A summary of findings from the literature review; employer focus groups; mixed<sup>2</sup> focus groups; and key informant interviews.

An in-depth breakdown of all research findings, including extensive analysis of the survey results by governance model, will be available in early 2009. To order a free print copy in advance, send a request for "*Final Supporting Employers Project Report*" to: [info@ccsc-cssge.ca](mailto:info@ccsc-cssge.ca) or fill out and return the form on page 22.

## A Note on Employment Setting and Governance Models

When reviewing this document, it is important to note that one goal of the research was to determine the distribution of various governance models by province/territory. Using previous definitions of ECEC governance models, information from the key informant interviews and focus groups, and by examining each of the groups' responses to the survey, a total of seven "governance model groups" were created. These groups were then used to further analyze the Employer Survey results.

Employers who completed the survey were asked to identify whether they were a **for-profit** or **non-profit** organization. Employers who were **non-profit** could choose from a list of multiple categories to best describe their governance model. It should be noted that governance model groups 2 to 7 in the table below all fall under a larger heading of **non-profit**. This is because when multiple groups were selected, the most "exclusive" category was chosen as the "primary" governance model. For example, community organizations, religious institutions, First Nations Band/Tribal Councils, and worksite/private company operated organizations (who all indicated they were **non-profit**) often indicated they had parent board members. Rather than group all of these organizations under a "non-profit board member operated" label, the more exclusive category (e.g. community organization, worksite/private company) was chosen.

Governance Model Group	Types of Governance Models Included in Group
1. Commercial/Private organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sole proprietor</li> <li>• Corporation</li> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Franchise</li> <li>• Co-op (for-profit)</li> </ul>
2. Non-Profit Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent board member operated</li> <li>• Community board member operated</li> <li>• Co-op (non-profit)</li> </ul>
3. Aboriginal organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations Band/Tribal Council operated</li> <li>• Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA)</li> </ul>
4. Community organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community organization (e.g. YMCA/YWCA, etc.)</li> <li>• Religious institution</li> </ul>
5. Worksite/private company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worksite/private company operated</li> </ul>
6. Educational Institution/Hospital organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University or college</li> <li>• School board</li> <li>• Hospital</li> </ul>
7. Government organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipal/local government</li> <li>• Provincial/territorial government</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Mixed stakeholders include representatives from municipal/provincial/territorial government, educational institutions, child care organizations, labour organizations and Aboriginal organizations.

# Employer Survey

Information was gathered directly from licensed employers via a mixed-mode telephone/online survey. Between March 27 and June 2, 2008, 987 surveys were completed, with proportional representation from each province and territory. Surveys were completed with an individual who was partly or solely responsible for the human resources management at their organization. Respondents included directors, managers, board members, supervisors or human resources specialists, depending on the organization. Thus, for the purpose of this project, the person most directly involved in HR issues, such as recruitment and retention of staff, training, setting workplace standards, etc. is considered the “employer”.

## Profile of Employer Survey Respondents

### GOVERNANCE: Distribution of *For-Profit* and *Non-Profit* Employer Respondents Per Province/Territory

On a national level, 70.3% of all 987 respondents felt their organization was best described as **non-profit**. About one-third (29.7%) of respondents identified their organization as **for-profit**.

Distribution of <i>For-Profit</i> and <i>Non-Profit</i> Employer Respondent Per Province/Territory		
Province	For-profit	Non-profit
AB	44.3%	55.7%
BC	47.9%	52.1%
MB	4.2%	95.8%
NB	72.0%	28.0%
NL	66.7%	33.3%
NS	48.9%	51.1%
NWT <sup>3</sup>	—	100.0%
NU <sup>4</sup>	—	100.0%
ON	24.7%	75.3%
PEI	46.2%	53.8%
QC	13.2%	86.8%
SK	3.2%	96.8%
YK	40.0%	60.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.7%</b>	<b>70.3%</b>

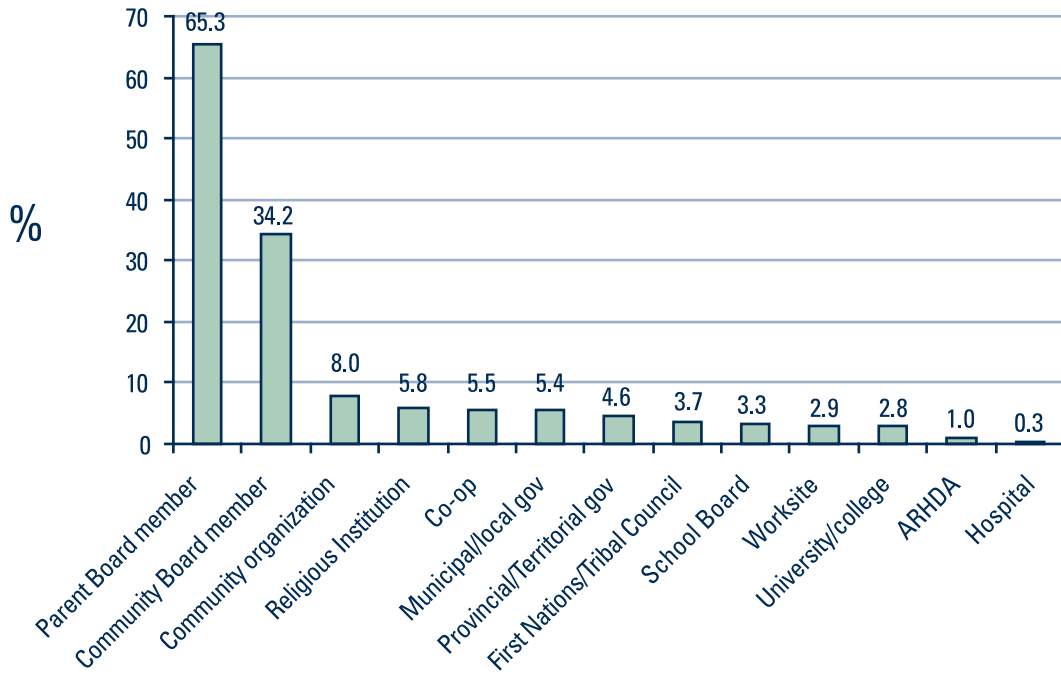
<sup>3</sup> While the Northwest Territories has both non-profit and for-profit/commercial child care employers, due to the limited sample size obtained in that territory results could not be analyzed.

<sup>4</sup> While the Nunavut has both non-profit and for-profit/commercial child care employers, due to the limited sample size obtained in that territory results could not be analyzed.

### GOVERNANCE: Distribution and Type of Non-Profit Governance Models

The majority of employers who self-identified as non-profit indicated that their organization was at least partly governed by a parent board (65.3%) or community board (34.2%). Respondents could choose all categories that were applicable, thus the categories are not mutually exclusive.

Distribution and Type of Non-Profit Governance Models

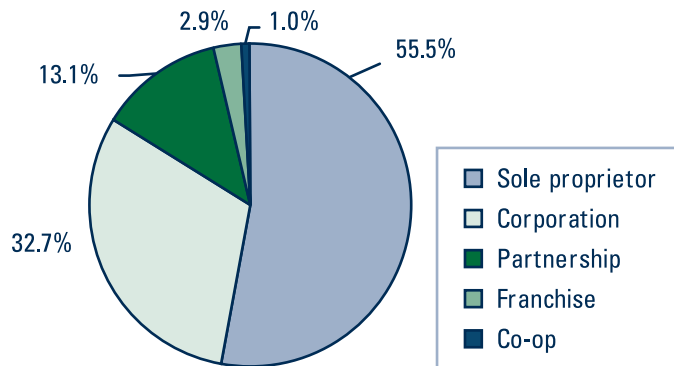


Note: AHRDA – Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement

### GOVERNANCE: Distribution and Type of For-Profit Governance Models

Of those employers who indicated that their organization was for-profit, 55.5% identified themselves as a sole proprietorship and 32.7% indicated that they were a corporation.

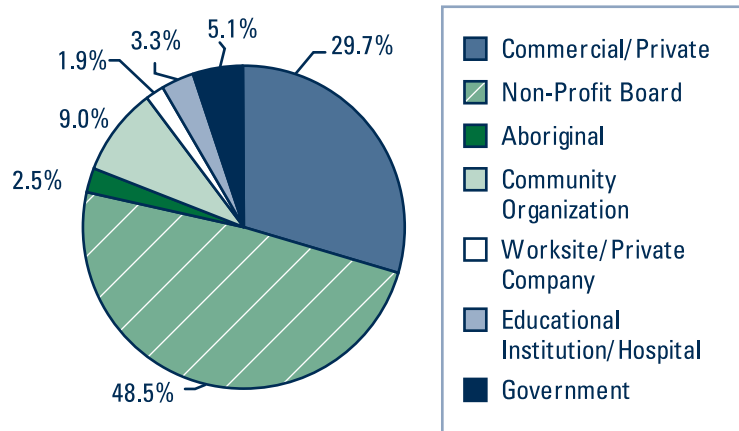
Distribution and Type of For-Profit Governance Models



### GOVERNANCE: Distribution of Governance Models Across Canada

The graph below details the distribution of various employer governance models across Canada, as identified by survey respondents.

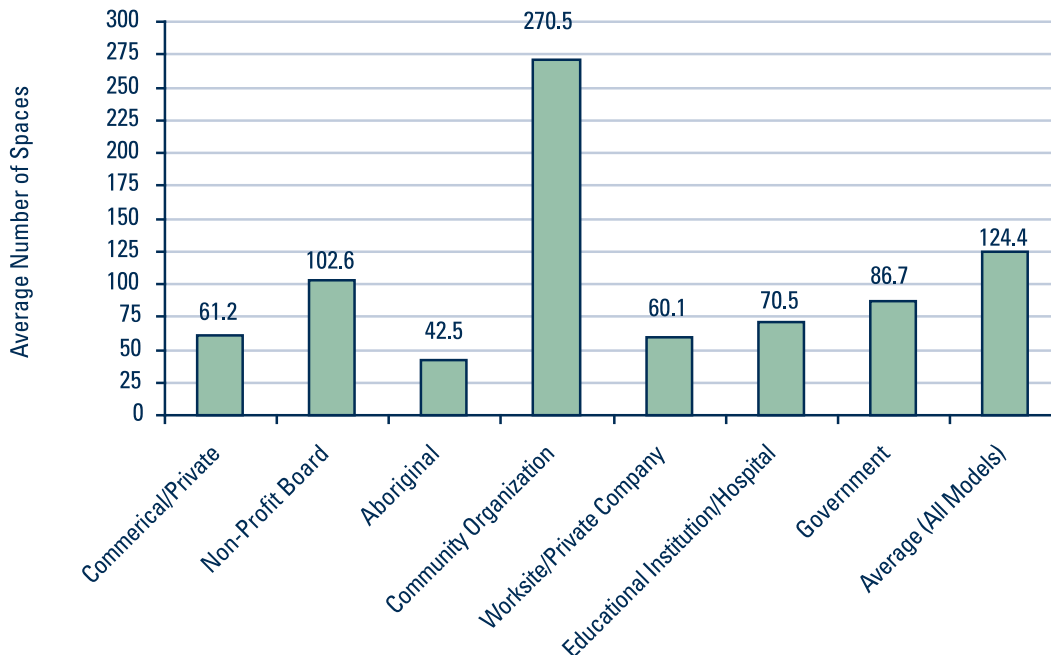
Distribution of Governance Models Across Canada



### EMPLOYER SIZE: Number of Licensed Spaces

Respondents were asked how many licensed child care spaces they maintained across all locations under their responsibility. This includes all full-time, part-time and extended care spaces for children from infant to 12 years of age.

Number of Licensed Child Care Spaces/Respondent by Governance Model Group

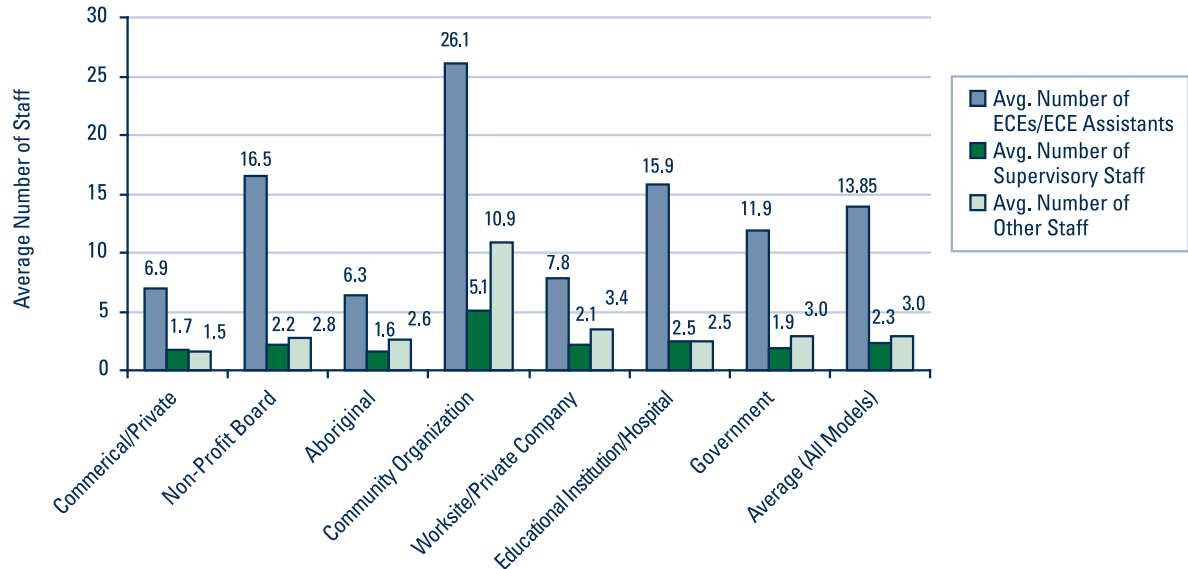


On average, respondents indicated overseeing 124.41 licensed child care spaces. Across Canada, the majority of respondents (64.6%) had between 26 and 100 child care spaces. Aboriginal child care organizations had the lowest average number of spaces (42.54) while community organizations had the highest (270.52).

## EMPLOYER SIZE: Number of Employees

Respondents were asked to describe the size of their staff (full-time, part-time and substitution), by detailing how many early childhood educators (ECEs) or ECE Assistants they employed, how many supervisory staff they employed and how many other staff related to the delivery of child care (e.g. support staff) they employed.

### Number of ECEs/ECE Assistants, Supervisory Staff and Other Staff by Governance Model Group



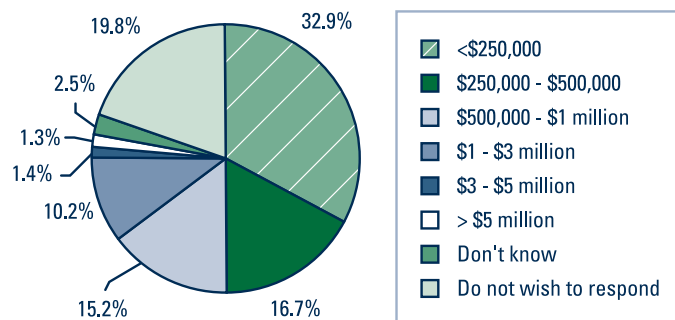
Further analysis showed that:

- Respondents employed an average of 13.85 ECEs/ECE assistants across all locations under their responsibility.
- Almost all (95.4%) respondents employed at least one ECE or ECE assistant.
- Approximately half of all respondents (48.3%) employed one supervisor, while 20.7% employed two.
- 12.2% of all respondents did not employ any supervisory staff members.
- On average, respondents employed approximately three additional staff related to the delivery of child care (e.g. support staff, administrative staff).
- One-fifth (20.5%) of all respondents did not employ any additional staff for the delivery of child care.

## EMPLOYER SIZE: Operating Budget

Survey respondents were asked to identify their annual operating budget. As the chart below illustrates, almost one-third of employers surveyed indicated that their annual operating budget was less than \$250,000.

### Annual Operating Budget

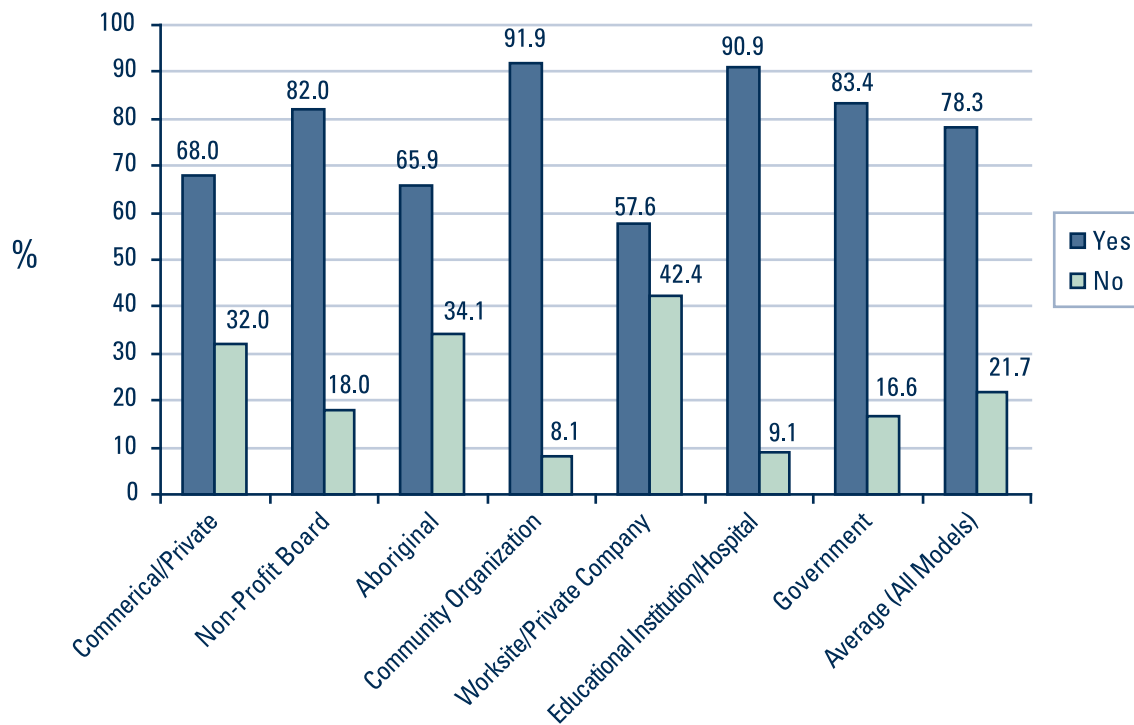


## Employer Perspectives on Training

### TRAINING: HR, Management or Leadership Training by Governance Model Group

Employers were asked if they had participated in any human resource, management or leadership training or professional development related to their current position. Over three quarters (78.3%) of participants had completed some kind of training or professional development.

HR, Management or Leadership Training by Governance Model Group

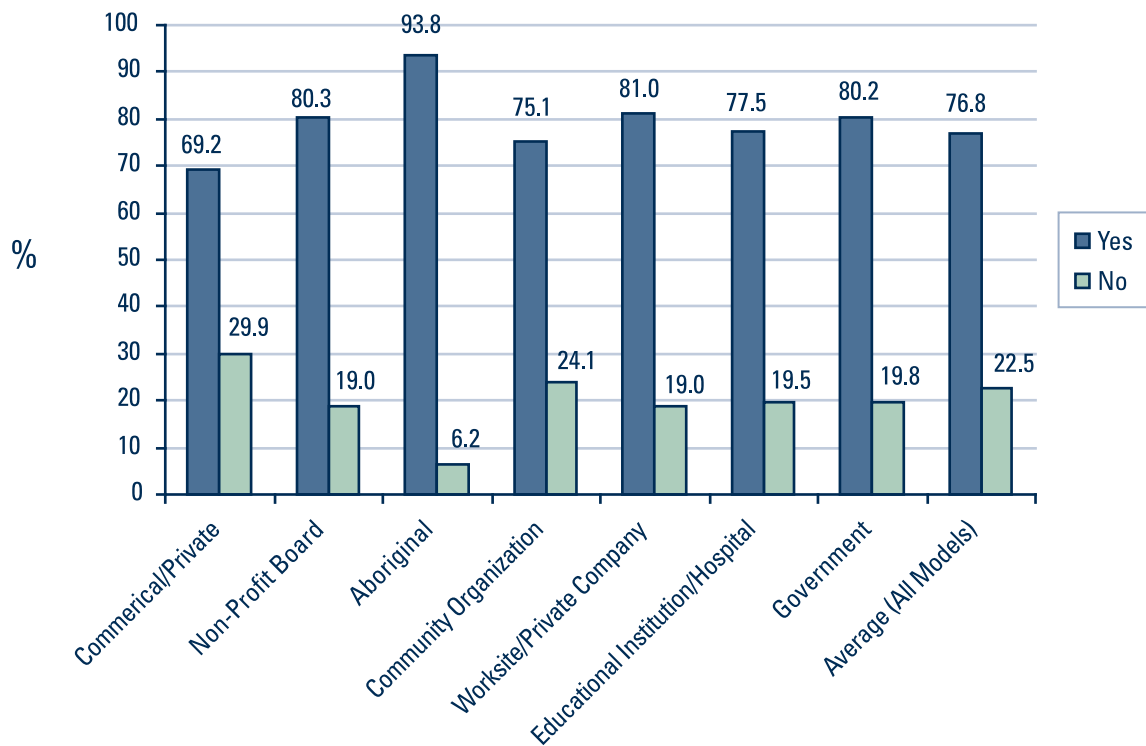


While the type of training/professional development varied greatly from respondent to respondent, this result shows that the majority of “employers” in the child care sector have been trying to improve their human resources, leadership or management capacity.

**TRAINING:****Employer or Management Team Benefit from HR Training by Governance Model**

Employers were asked if they or their management team would benefit from or need any training or professional development related to human resources management in the next two to three years. Approximately three-quarters of employers (76.8%) felt that they or their management team would benefit from HR training.

Employer or Management Team Benefit from HR Training by Governance Model





**TRAINING:****Employer or Management Team Benefit from HR Training by Governance Model**

Each employer completing the survey was presented with a series of human resources topics and was asked to indicate whether they believed that they or someone else in their organization would benefit from training or assistance in that area.

Employer or Management Team Benefit from HR Training by Governance Model								
Would you or your management team benefit from HR training?	Commercial/Private	Non-Profit Board	Aboriginal	Community organization	Worksite/private company	Educational Institution/Hospital	Government	Total
Conflict management skills	74.5%	80.0%	85.8%	78.8%	86.9%	82.7%	87.6%	<b>79.0%</b>
Leadership, mentoring and coaching skills	73.2%	76.3%	80.9%	80.2%	74.4%	78.9%	84.6%	<b>76.3%</b>
Team building skills	72.6%	74.1%	93.8%	76.8%	77.5%	76.8%	77.5%	<b>74.7%</b>
Reviewing staff performance	66.5%	77.8%	87.7%	76.4%	72.4%	64.2%	81.7%	<b>74.2%</b>
How to find and attract suitable staff	67.5%	66.5%	77.9%	72.7%	77.5%	81.8%	70.4%	<b>68.5%</b>
Development of HR policies	65.8%	68.6%	65.3%	71.6%	74.4%	66.4%	64.5%	<b>67.8%</b>
Understanding HR roles and responsibilities	67.1%	68.1%	77.8%	70.1%	70.3%	54.1%	66.9%	<b>67.7%</b>
How to select and hire suitable staff	65.5%	64.8%	74.9%	66.5%	85.5%	76.4%	68.2%	<b>66.3%</b>
Written and oral HR communication skills	61.0%	65.7%	74.8%	70.7%	62.3%	59.6%	68.0%	<b>64.8%</b>
Employee development	59.1%	63.8%	79.0%	69.1%	78.9%	81.8%	54.8%	<b>63.7%</b>
Employment standards/human rights legislation	62.9%	60.0%	66.7%	66.4%	58.2%	69.2%	63.2%	<b>62.0%</b>
Staff training	62.6%	57.0%	90.8%	69.9%	73.0%	71.3%	66.8%	<b>61.9%</b>
Job evaluation and compensation planning	61.2%	53.6%	84.8%	73.9%	67.9%	50.7%	64.9%	<b>59.2%</b>
Staff orientation	57.0%	53.7%	73.0%	65.7%	66.4%	67.6%	66.5%	<b>57.6%</b>
Use of HR data tracking systems	47.7%	55.8%	68.8%	56.0%	38.5%	51.9%	61.4%	<b>53.6%</b>
Creation of job descriptions	50.8%	48.3%	66.9%	59.5%	46.8%	61.5%	60.6%	<b>51.6%</b>

The human resource areas chosen most frequently deal with staff issues, such as conflict management skills (79.0%), leadership/mentoring/coaching skills (76.3%), team building skills (74.7%) and reviewing staff performance (74.2%). Of note is that every individual area was of interest to at least 50% of respondents, demonstrating that most human resources information would be of benefit to at minimum half of the sector.

## TRAINING: Barriers Limiting Ability to Take HR, Management or Leadership Training

All respondents were asked what they saw as the greatest barriers to taking human resources, management or leadership training or professional development. The most common response was that employers lacked time or faced difficulties getting away from work (54.5%).

Barriers Limiting Ability to Take HR, Management or Leadership Training by Governance Model Group								
Barrier	Commercial/ Private	Non-Profit Board	Aboriginal	Community organization	Worksite/ private company	Educational Institution/ Hospital	Government	Average/ All Models
Lack of time/ ability to get away	63.1%	52.1%	37.5%	45.0%	54.1%	53.4%	53.1%	<b>54.5%</b>
Funding/cost of training	20.5%	32.5%	35.4%	38.0%	6.6%	15.9%	42.9%	<b>29.0%</b>
Location of training/ not offered in area	9.1%	17.0%	24.2%	14.3%	6.6%	6.1%	19.5%	<b>14.2%</b>
Cannot be out of centre for full day	13.6%	9.8%	20.2%	17.5%	15.2%	19.1%	9.0%	<b>12.2%</b>
Course content not relevant	5.3%	5.0%	8.0%	5.2%	16.6%	4.3%	6.3%	<b>5.4%</b>

*Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.*

When examined by governance model, results show that:

- Funding or the cost of training was identified as less of an issue for worksite/private company governed organizations (6.6%) and educational institutions/hospitals (15.9%);
- The location of training was a particular issue for Aboriginal governed organizations (24.2%); and
- Employers from worksite/private company governed organizations more commonly felt that course content was not relevant to their position or needs (16.6%) as compared to the other governance models.

# Recruitment and Retention

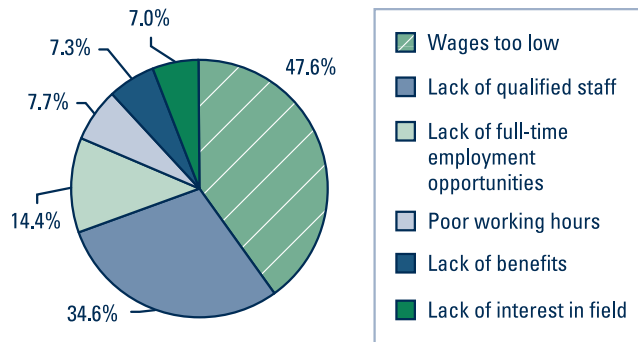
## RECRUITMENT: Reasons for Recruiting Challenges

When asked if they faced any challenges recruiting child care staff over the past year, just over half (53.4%) of all respondents said they faced some difficulties. Of those respondents who faced difficulty recruiting:

- 77.4% had difficulty recruiting ECEs;
- 29.4% had difficulty recruiting ECE assistants; and
- 11.8% had difficulty recruiting directors/supervisors.

Of those survey respondents who said they had difficulties recruiting staff, the most common reasons given for the difficulties were that wages are low (47.6%) and there is a general shortage of qualified/trained workers (34.6%).

### Reasons for Recruiting Challenges



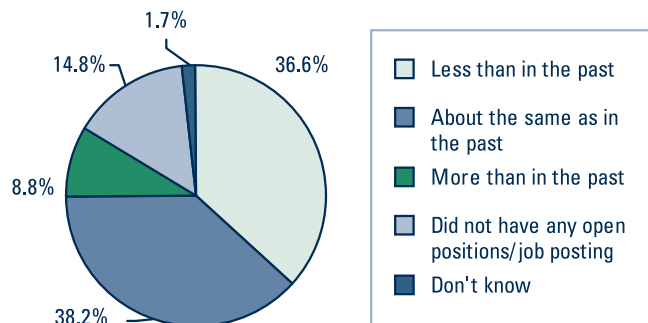
Note: Total may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.

## RECRUITMENT:

### Number of Applicants for Open Positions over Past Year Compared to Five Years Ago

One potential reason for the challenges that employers face is that there may be an overall shortage of individuals applying for available positions. Employers were asked to compare the number of applications they received over the past year with the previous five years.

### Number of Applicants for Open Positions over Past Year Compared to Five Years Ago

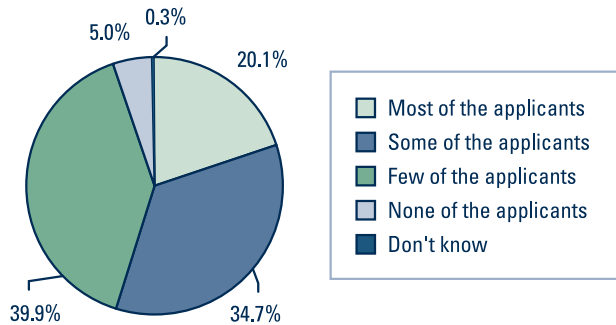


About one-third of employers (36.6%) felt they were receiving fewer applications, while 8.8% were receiving more applications.

### RECRUITMENT: Proportion of Applicants Qualified for Open Positions

Employers who had an open position over the past year were asked if, generally speaking, the applicants were qualified for the position.

Proportion of Applicants Qualified for Open Positions

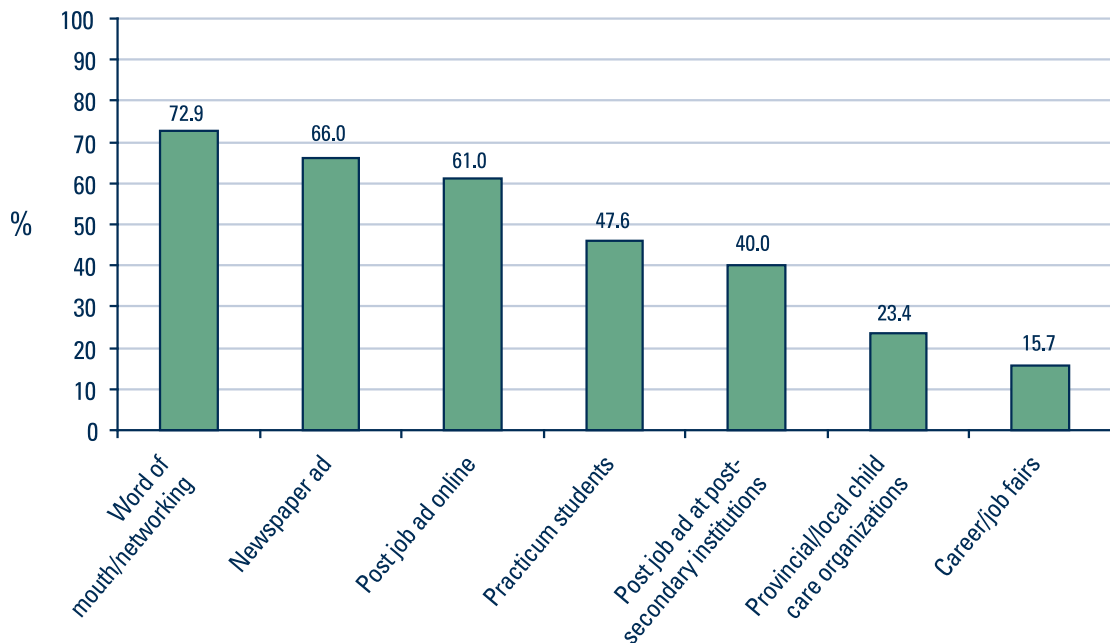


Over one-third (39.9%) of employers felt that few applicants were qualified for the available position, while 34.7% felt that only some of the applicants were qualified.

### RECRUITMENT: Strategies Used to Recruit Staff by Governance Model

Employers were asked what strategies they typically used to recruit staff. As shown in the table below, employers most often relied on word of mouth or networking to find new staff (72.9%). Many employers also utilized more traditional methods of recruiting staff such as newspaper advertisements (66.0%) and posting job ads online (61.0%).

Strategies Used to Recruit Staff by Governance Model

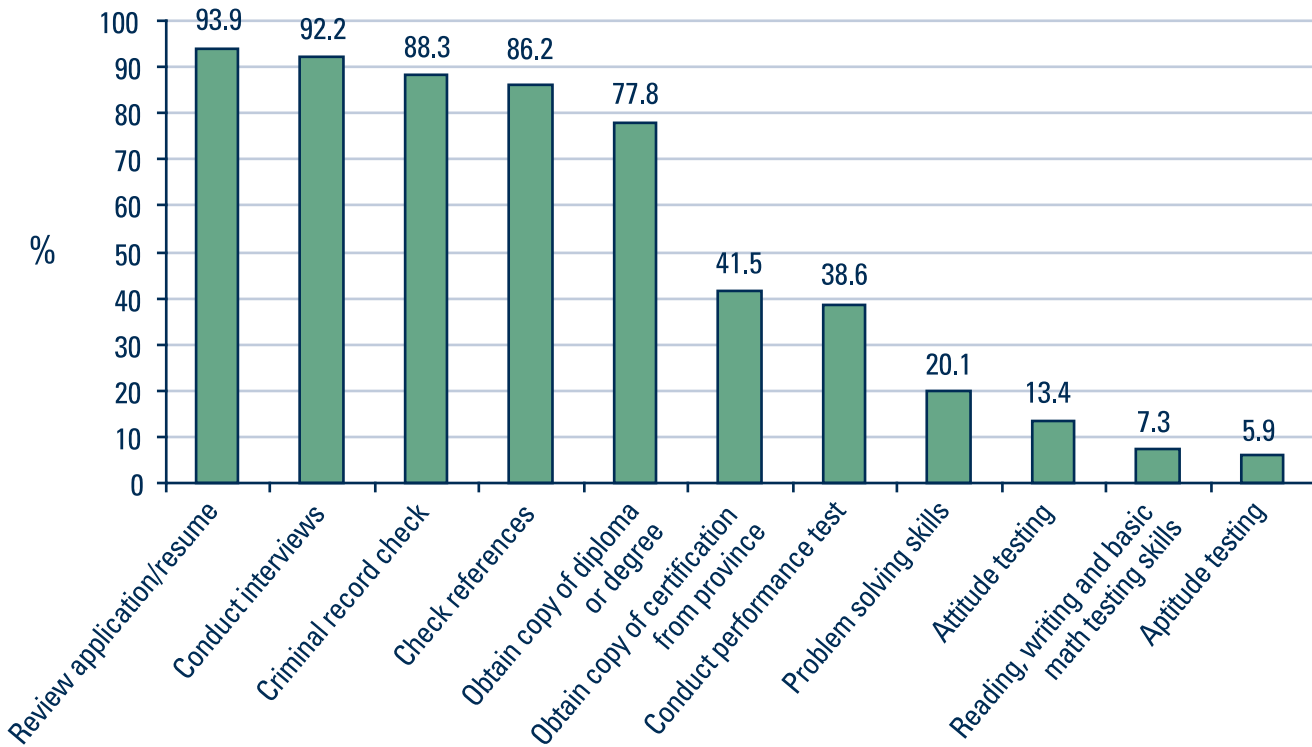


Note: Total may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.

## RECRUITMENT: Employer Screening of Potential Candidates by Governance Model

Employers were asked to describe the type of candidate screening they do prior to hiring new staff. The screening methods utilized by employers were relatively consistent across all governance models.

Employer Screening of Potential Candidates by Governance Model



Note: Total may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.

## Main Challenges Employers Face in Human Resources Management Role by Governance Model Group

In order to gauge employers' perceptions of human resources issues, each respondent was asked what the main challenges were in fulfilling the human resource management/leadership role at their organization.

Main Challenges Employers Face in Human Resources Management Role by Governance Model Group								
Reason for Challenges	Commercial/Private	Non-Profit Board	Aboriginal	Community organization	Worksite/Private company	Educational Institution/Hospital	Government	Total
Recruitment of qualified staff/lack of qualified staff	29.3%	27.2%	21.5%	30.7%	50.4%	22.4%	29.3%	<b>28.4%</b>
Lack of time	12.6%	12.7%	12.1%	11.3%	4.1%	13.8%	6.7%	<b>12.1%</b>
Provision of adequate wages	11.1%	8.2%	28.5%	13.0%	10.7%	12.0%	3.8%	<b>9.9%</b>
Finding on-call/substitution/casual staff	4.2%	8.1%	—	5.1%	—	17.2%	8.2%	<b>6.6%</b>
Funding issues	5.4%	3.5%	9.9%	9.6%	4.1%	5.9%	6.7%	<b>5.0%</b>
Retention of qualified staff	3.5%	5.0%	—	7.3%	8.0%	4.7%	5.8%	<b>4.7%</b>
Lack of HR knowledge/training	3.2%	4.6%	4.9%	2.2%	4.1%	6.1%	11.0%	<b>4.3%</b>
Maintaining relationships/teamwork	3.5%	4.2%	—	3.6%	—	5.1%	1.5%	<b>3.7%</b>
None/No Comment	25.8%	15.9%	22.2%	16.9%	23.8%	18.0%	13.5%	<b>25.3%</b>

*Note: Total may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.*

When examined by governance model, results show that:

- Over half of all worksite/private company organizations (50.4%) reported recruiting staff as the main challenge facing their organization;
- Aboriginal governed organizations reported the provision of adequate wages as a challenge more frequently than all other governance models (28.5%);
- Educational institution/hospital governed organizations more frequently noted challenges finding on-call or substitution staff than other models (17.2%);
- Government-run organizations rarely reported provision of adequate wages as an issue (3.8%).

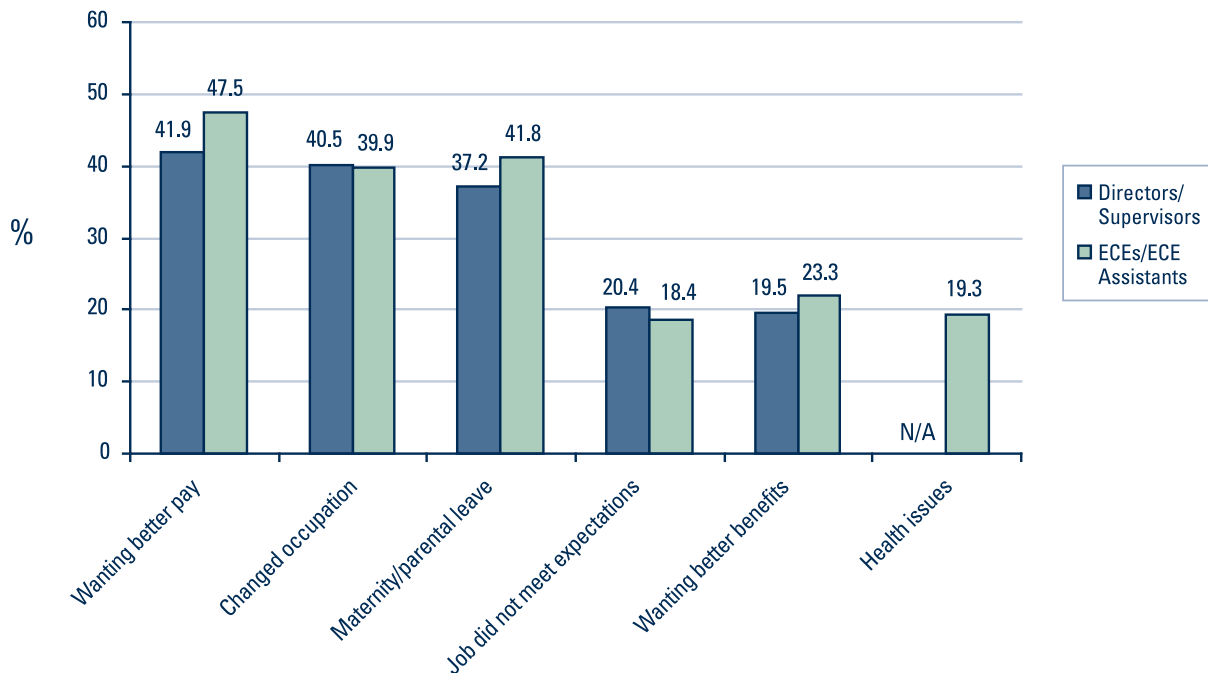
**RETENTION:****Reasons Directors/Supervisors and ECEs/ECE Assistants Left Organization**

Almost two-thirds (65.2%) of all survey respondents felt that staff turnover (including maternity/parental leave) was an issue during the last two years. More specifically:

- 62.3% of all survey respondents had at least one staff member leave their organization over the past two years;
- Over half (58.4%) of all survey respondents had an ECE or ECE assistant leave over the past two years;
- 16.0% of all respondents had a director or supervisor leave over the past two years.

The graph below compares the reasons why directors/ supervisors left the organization with the reasons ECEs/ECE Assistants left the organization.

**Reasons Directors/Supervisors and ECEs/ECE Assistants Left Organization**



*Note: Total may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.*

As shown above ECEs/ECE assistants left for many of the same reasons as directors/supervisors, including wanting better pay (47.5%), maternity/parental leave (41.8%) and changing occupation (39.9%). An additional reason for ECEs/ECE assistants leaving the organization, which was mentioned infrequently for directors/supervisors, was health issues (19.3%).

## RETENTION: Strategies Used to Retain Staff/Reduce Turnover by Governance Model

Employers participating in the employer survey were asked what strategies their organization has implemented in order to retain staff and reduce turnover. About 40.3% of all respondents stated they did not have any specific strategies to retain staff or reduce turnover. Of those that did, the most common strategy used by over one-quarter of all employers was the provision of staff benefits (27.4%). Just under a quarter of all employers (23.4%) commented that they offered their staff competitive salaries to encourage staff to remain with the organization.

Strategies Used to Retain Staff/Reduce Turnover by Governance Model								
Retention Strategy	Commercial/ Private	Non-Profit Board	Aboriginal	Community organization	Worksite/ Private company	Educational Institution/ Hospital	Government	Average/ All models
Provide staff benefits (e.g. RRSP, health benefits, mental health sick days)	19.5%	25.5%	16.7%	34.7%	32.1%	47.0%	14.2%	<b>27.4%</b>
Offer competitive salaries	20.6%	23.3%	31.5%	24.3%	10.7%	47.2%	24.2%	<b>23.4%</b>
Offer paid training/ professional development	16.9%	19.0%	17.2%	24.6%	33.2%	19.4%	15.8%	<b>18.9%</b>
Provide staff incentives (e.g. gym membership, free childcare, paid travel)	5.4%	4.2%	3.1%	7.7%	23.2%	4.7%	6.6%	<b>5.3%</b>
Positive/supportive work environment	12.1%	14.1%	—	12.9%	25.2%	13.0%	6.4%	<b>12.8%</b>
Effective communication with staff	11.6%	10.7%	8.0%	8.8%	10.7%	—	—	<b>10.0%</b>
Flexible/reduced hours	8.5%	6.2%	3.1%	6.6%	—	9.3%	1.5%	<b>6.6%</b>
None	44.1%	39.8%	44.6%	33.7%	47.5%	26.1%	45.0%	<b>40.3%</b>

*Note: Total may not equal 100% due to multiple responses.*

When analyzed by governance model, the data showed that:

- Provision of staff benefits was more common among educational institutions/hospitals (47.0%), community organizations (34.7%) and worksite/private operated organizations (32.1%);
- Provision of competitive salary was more common among educational institutions/hospitals (47.2%) and aboriginal organizations (31.5%); and
- Worksite/private company governed organizations were more likely to offer paid training/professional development (33.2%), provide staff incentives (23.2%) and offer a positive/supportive work environment (25.2%) than other governance models.



# Human Resources Issues Identified during the Research Process

The following section details the human resource issues faced by ECEC employers. Issues were identified via the key informant interviews, focus groups and employer survey. While issues are discussed individually, it should be noted that many of the issues are interrelated. The five human resources issues identified most frequently were:

- Internal HR capacity and leadership
- Recruitment and retention of qualified staff
- Training and professional development
- Respect and recognition of the profession
- Compensation: Wages and Benefits

Several other points of interest, most related to the issues above, were identified through the research process and are explored later on in this section.

## Internal HR capacity and leadership:

Many employers indicated that they were promoted into their current role because they were good practitioners; but did not necessarily have the educational or experiential background of an “employer” or administrator.<sup>5</sup> Many lacked formal HR training and learned most of the human resources/management skills required on their own. Thus, the issues that employers face are often compounded by a relative lack of knowledge and/or experience with human resources.

Smaller organizations, which are very common in the sector, often do not have support staff that can help with the many HR duties required. As such, directors/administrators are required to wear many hats, and perform various duties including accounting, payroll, hiring, evaluation, training/professional development planning, etc. As many organizations are short-staffed, this puts additional strain on employers and limits

their ability to further develop their HR skills. Key informants and focus group participants also commented that many organizations are governed by a volunteer board, many of whom do not have specific HR training or skills. This often compounds the lack organizational HR capacity.

## Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff:

Recruitment and retention of qualified staff was the most frequently noted human resources issue facing employers in the child care sector. More specifically, over half of Employer Survey respondents reported recruitment challenges, while almost two-thirds said staff turnover was an issue for their organization. Several factors contribute to the recruitment and retention challenges facing employers including a lack of respect for early childhood education as a profession and generally low compensation (see Respect & Recognition and Compensation: Wages and Benefits section for details). Other contributing factors are discussed below:

### Availability of qualified applicants:

Stakeholders reported a general lack of qualified staff in the sector as a key issue. Employer Survey respondents noted that, compared to five years ago, there are fewer applicants applying for available positions. As well, employers felt that of those who did apply, fewer were qualified for the position. It was also noted while many new graduates are well-prepared, the proportion who were seen as unprepared was of concern. However, some key informants commented that graduates with new ideas are not always supported. This is an important consideration as employers look to address retention issues.

Employers also indicated that many new graduates choose to use their ECE training as a “stepping stone” to a career in a higher paying, more competitive sector. Education was identified as a key sector to which many ECE workers were drawn, due to much higher pay scales, benefits, professional development days, and holidays/summers off.

<sup>5</sup> Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, *Career Promotions and Recruitment Strategy Project: Executive Summary*.

### Competition from other non-related sectors:

Several key informants and focus group participants commented that it is difficult for child care organizations to compete for staff. The training an ECE receives is now applicable to other domains, and in areas where the economy is booming competition from non-related industries (e.g. service sector) is strong. Conversely, in areas where there is a relative economic slump, attracting ECE's to relatively low paying child care jobs is also a challenge. Child care operators in rural, northern and remote areas were said to face even greater challenges with recruiting qualified, trained staff.

### Working Conditions, Health & Well-Being:

Working in child care can be difficult, with long days and physically demanding and stressful work. Thus, working conditions can also contribute to the sector's recruitment, retention and staff training challenges. More specifically:

- The physical demands of working directly with children can lead to a variety of physical injuries and have an impact on the available workforce.<sup>6</sup>
- Staff stress and burnout contribute to the problem of worker retention in the sector.
- Individuals who do receive college or university training are often required to do custodial work as part of their job, which many do not expect. In addition, those with formal training often do the same work as those with no formal training. This provides little incentive for those without training to pursue education or professional development.

As the sector faces recruitment and retention difficulties, having a healthy available workforce becomes all the more critical. If staff leave or take time off due to illness, stress or injury, further strain is placed on employers who are often already short-staffed.

## Training and Professional Development

**Training/professional development opportunities for staff:** In addition to a general lack of trained staff, access to training, both for new students and for individuals already working in the sector, was an issue affecting employers. In order for employers to improve recruitment and retention, there is a need to support individuals to obtain the education and qualifications they need to provide high quality services.<sup>7</sup> Barriers to accessing education and professional development include:

- **The resources—money and time—required for formal ECE training.** Getting an ECE diploma or degree can take anywhere between two to four years, which is not always a viable option for staff. This is especially challenging for those who have been in the field for a long period of time, or who are recent immigrants. However, employers rarely have adequate resources to cover the cost of ECE training programs for their staff.
- **Find replacement/substitute staff to fill in for staffs who attend training.** This is a challenge for many employers. By extension, where there are labour force shortages, staff may have difficulty obtaining release from their work schedules to pursue training. This puts further stress and strain on a workforce that is already facing many challenges.
- **Little incentive to pursue further training or professional development.** Tuition is expensive and, often, obtaining further training does not result in a significant pay increase. Many noted there is little “return on investment”, creating a challenge for employers who want to encourage training/professional development for staff.

**Professional development for leaders in the sector:** Professional development activities for those in leadership roles were identified as an area for further action. Key informants most commonly stated that any training or professional development should be directed at directors/administrators, supervisors or board members. However, due to labour shortages and the increased demands placed on administrators (e.g. working directly with children), they often have

<sup>6</sup> K. Bright and K. Calabro, “Child care workers and workplace hazards in the United States: Overview of research and implications for occupational health professionals,” *Occupational Medicine* 49.7 (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Lero, Donna et al. *Investing in Quality: Policies, practitioners, programs and parents: A four-point plan to deliver high quality early learning and care services in Ontario*. Ontario: Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, 2007.

very limited time to attend professional development activities. Overall, employer survey respondents noted cost and inability to be away from the workplace as the most common reason for not participating in professional development.<sup>8</sup>

While about three-quarters of employers surveyed had participated in some form of human resources, leadership or management training or professional development, just as many felt they would benefit from further training or professional development. However, the research indicated that training specifically related to human resources/leadership in the child care sector is limited, as until recently the majority of training for the sector has focused on early childhood education (ECE) training for practitioners and less on human resource management for leaders in the sector.

### Respect and Recognition:

A well-documented issue that impacts employers is the lack of respect for early childhood education and care as a profession.<sup>9</sup> |<sup>10</sup> Many key informants and focus group participants commented that the general public often does not value, nor understand, the contribution that early childhood education makes to society. There is a general lack of understanding about the work in the sector and the skills and knowledge required,<sup>11</sup> |<sup>12</sup> |<sup>13</sup> with ECE's often viewed as "babysitters" rather than professionals.<sup>14</sup> This lack of recognition and understanding poses a challenge to all employers attempting to attract and retain qualified individuals to the field or to a particular job. It is difficult to attract skilled individuals to a profession where they are generally not respected.

### Compensation: Wages and Benefits:

Staff wages are generally low, especially when compared to other jobs with similar training requirements and levels of responsibility. The ability of employers to pay staff competitive wages and to provide benefits was a challenge faced by many employers in the sector. This is due in part to the fact that the majority of operating costs at child care centres, from which staff salaries are drawn, come from parent fees.<sup>15</sup> While there are government subsidies and funding opportunities, most employers face difficulties paying their staff significantly higher wages without raising parent fees. Focus group participants commented that low pay can be especially problematic for new graduates, many of whom have student loans and cannot afford to work in the sector.

About one-quarter of survey respondents mentioned providing benefits or competitive wages as key strategies used to retain staff. While this shows that some organizations can offer higher wages and benefits, it also seems to indicate that there is a significant proportion of the workforce that does not have access to benefits or competitive wages. Many stakeholders felt that this lack of competitive wages and benefits, in combination with challenging working conditions, were the leading reasons for the recruitment and retention issues facing the sector. Another frequently mentioned reason for the low compensation levels was the general lack of respect for the field (see *Respect & Recognition* above). The majority of key informants and focus group participants felt workers are paid in accordance with the value society places upon their work.

<sup>8</sup> Doherty, Gillian, Martha Friendly, and Jane Beach. *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Canadian Background Report*. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003. [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Doherty et al, *You Bet I Care!: A Canada-wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions, and Practices in Child Care Centres*, (Guelph: Centre for Families, Work, and Well-Being, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, *Career Promotions and Recruitment Strategy Project: Executive Summary*.

<sup>11</sup> Doherty et al, *You Bet I Care!: A Canada-wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions, and Practices in Child Care Centres*, (Guelph: Centre for Families, Work, and Well-Being, 2000), xxvii.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Beach, Jane Bertrand, Barry Forer, Donna Michal, and Jocelyn Tougas, *Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce: Main Report* (Ottawa, ON: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2004), 123, [www.cpsc-cssge.ca/english/pdf/research/CCHRSC20main\\_en.pdf](http://www.cpsc-cssge.ca/english/pdf/research/CCHRSC20main_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> "Who's Watching the Kids? The State of Child Care in America," Knowledge@Wharton (2000). <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=257>

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Siggner, *Exploring Recruitment and Retention Issues for BC's Community Social Service Sector Employers* (Vancouver, BC: Social Planning and Research Council of BC, 2008), 27.

<sup>15</sup> OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care: Canadian Background Report (2003). [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf)

## Additional HR Issues Identified:

In addition to the top five human resource issues discussed previously, several other issues were identified by key informants or focus group participants. These are discussed below.

### HR Challenges in Aboriginal Communities:

Child care employers in Aboriginal communities face some unique human resources challenges. The need for culturally appropriate programs and services is a key part of Aboriginal peoples' continued building of strength, citizenship, and wellness communities.<sup>16</sup> Some key informants and focus group participants noted that training is rarely offered in First Nations/Inuit languages, which may be staff's first language. Also, the material covered in many "mainstream" training programs often does not reflect the Northern reality.

In addition, children with special needs have been identified as an important issue for Aboriginal communities.<sup>17</sup> However, it is difficult for employers to get specialized training for their staff for a variety of reasons, including location, cost, and a general lack of specialized training opportunities. In a labour market context where employers are having difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff, the literature on Aboriginal child care suggests that the unique requirements of Aboriginal communities may pose an additional challenge to administrators/employers in those communities.

**HR Challenges in Rural, Remote and/or Northern Communities:** Key informants and focus group participants in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut noted that with no professional association in the Northwest Territories or Nunavut, many operators are isolated with few support networks. While some participants mentioned networking and sharing among a few colleagues, it is generally difficult to bring people together, as travel is almost always

required and very expensive. In addition, there are few training opportunities available in the North, and the training available often requires travel. As well, attending training in person may require shutting down a centre due to the significant lack of replacement staff in the North. Distance education—an alternative form of education/training—is not available to all areas of the North due to the lack of internet access.

**Diversity & integration of immigrants in workforce:** Employers are increasingly interested in building a diverse staff that is reflective of the children and communities they serve.<sup>18</sup> Often, employers look to integrate new Canadians with ECE or education backgrounds to meet this challenge. However, newcomers to Canada may face language and cultural barriers,<sup>19</sup> and have difficulties with foreign credential recognition.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the integration of immigrant workers into the workforce may pose a significant challenge for employers.

**Few leaders and high attrition:** Several key informants noted that there is an overall lack of leaders in the sector. While there are some leaders currently working in the field, many are nearing retirement age and there is a lack of new individuals to take their place. A related concern was the lack of a clear career advancement infrastructure in the sector. There are no clear lines of advancement in the sector, which may contribute to the difficulty in developing or identifying leaders. It was said that the lack of infrastructure was a contributing factor to the lack of "professionalization" of the field, which impacts society's view of the sector as a whole.

<sup>16</sup> Margo Greenwood, "Children as Citizens of First Nations: Linking Indigenous health to early childhood development," *Pediatric Child Health* 10.9 (November 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Monty Palmentier, "Building a Community of Communities": Results & Discussion of the National Roundtable on Aboriginal ECD: What Can Research Offer Aboriginal Head Start (Aboriginal Head Start in Urban & Northern Communities and Centre of Excellence for Children & Adolescents with Special Needs, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Gonzalo E. Shoobridge, "Multi-Ethnic Workforce and Business Performance: Review and Synthesis of the Empirical Literature," *Human Resource Development Review* 5.1 (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Doherty, Gillian, Martha Friendly, and Jane Beach. *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Canadian Background Report*. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003. [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Jane Beach and Kathleen Flanagan, *People, Programs and Practices: A Training Strategy for the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2007).

**Gender:** Women form the vast majority of the child care labour force and this has some direct impacts on employers. For example, women are often responsible for the majority of family care and related responsibilities. Flexibility in scheduling, unanticipated leave (e.g., child illness), anticipated leave (e.g., long-term care of family member), work location, and overall career flexibility (e.g., parental leave) have been identified as key factors in optimizing women's labour force participation.<sup>21</sup> However, with labour shortages facing the sector, the ability for an employer to be flexible is limited. This in turn impacts the ability to attract and retain women in the field.

Furthermore, women working in child care professions are paid less, on average, than those working in other female-dominated professions requiring similar levels of education.<sup>22</sup> Often when they have their own families, they can no longer afford to work in field.

Maternity and parental leave is another factor contributing to the retention of staff. Many of the younger workers who enter the field leave after a short while to go on maternity leave. While these staff may return after one or two years, maternity leave creates staff shortages for many organizations.

**Meaningful Inclusion:** Children with special needs, those who are newcomers or have distinct cultural backgrounds, and those from low-income backgrounds all have specific needs.<sup>23</sup> Equity of access and meaningful inclusion are reliant on a knowledgeable and skilled workforce, and on funding to provide supports where needed. The inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds has a direct impact on employers', as they often have to find staff who have appropriate skills and training (for example in second language acquisition).<sup>24</sup> Perhaps more importantly, employers must find staff with the knowledge and skills needed to work with families who may be experiencing stresses such financial difficulties, domestic upheaval, or recent immigration.<sup>25</sup> Thus, as the sector becomes more inclusive, the need to find and retain well-trained staff becomes more pronounced.

**A note on policy and funding:** The key human resources issues facing the sector, including recruitment/retention, compensation, and working conditions cannot be considered in a vacuum. These issues are intrinsically related to policy, funding, and infrastructure.<sup>26</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommends increasing public funding of child care services and encourages provincial/territorial governments to establish early childhood strategies in consultation with major stakeholders.<sup>27</sup> They suggest expanding access to services and ensuring that workers undergo professional reviews and appropriate training, recommendations that are related to employers' human resources capacity. Any increase in public funding, access to care and staff training/evaluation will have a direct impact on employers.

<sup>21</sup> Heather Boushey, "Family-Friendly Policies: Boosting Mothers' Wages," (Washington, DC: Centre for Economic and Policy Research, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Cleveland, Gordon H. and Douglas E. Hyatt. "Child care workers' wages: New evidence on returns to education, experience, job tenure and auspice." *Journal of Population Economics* 15 (2002).

<sup>23</sup> Beach et al, *Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce: Main Report* (Ottawa, ON: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2004), 123. [www.csc-csge.ca/english/pdf/research/CCHRSC20main\\_en.pdf](http://www.csc-csge.ca/english/pdf/research/CCHRSC20main_en.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Elise Jepson Green, "Guidelines for Serving Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Young Children," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 24.3 (1997).

<sup>25</sup> Swick, Kevin James and Reginald D. Williams, "An Analysis of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Perspective for Early Childhood Educators: Implications for Working with Families Experiencing Stress." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 33.5 (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Child Care Advocacy Forum, "Campaigns".

<sup>27</sup> OECD Directorate for Education, *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Canada Country Note* (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003-2004). [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/34/33850725.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/34/33850725.pdf)

## Conclusion

The preliminary research findings outlined in this document provide important information that must be carefully considered when developing a strategy to address the human resources needs of ECEC Employers in Canada. With the research phase of the *Supporting Employers in the ECEC Sector* now complete, the focus is now on analyzing all information gathered in order to produce an extensive Final Report which will:

- Fully document all research findings, including analysis by governance model;
- Prioritize the human resources issues facing employers and identify areas for action;
- Document best practices for addressing human resource issues and available human resource tools in the sector; and
- Recommend human resource tools/resources/strategies for future development.

To order your free copy of the final *Supporting Employers in ECEC Report*, e-mail [info@ccsc-cssge.ca](mailto:info@ccsc-cssge.ca) or fill out and return the form below via fax: 613-239-0533 or mail:

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