

Childcare training colleges marked as failures by skills authority

NATASHA BITA THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEMBER 10, 2014 12:00AM

DOZENS of childcare training colleges have been caught churning out graduates who cannot change nappies, supervise children or write English.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority has in the past three months audited one in four of Australia's 289 training colleges offering childcare, and judged 80 per cent to be substandard.

The audit of 77 colleges was triggered by complaints to the Productivity Commission's childcare inquiry about "poorly trained" staff with "fast and cheap" qualifications.

Taxpayers have spent \$100 million funding free childcare diplomas and subsidising Certificate III qualifications for thousands of students over the past four years, to tackle a shortage of qualified staff.

Authority chief executive Chris Robinson said yesterday some colleges had been stripped of registration. He said a fifth of the training providers remained substandard, even after being given a chance to rectify problems. The most common failure related to training colleges' - assessment methods, and "recognition of prior learning" to fast-track students.

"There are some cases where training has been woefully inadequate," Mr Robinson told The Australian. "It is absolutely crucial in the human services industries that people are properly trained."

Australian Childcare Alliance president Gwynn Bridge warned yesterday that some recent graduates were not "safe or suitable" to care for children.

She said some graduates could not change a nappy, did not know how to supervise children and could not speak English well enough to fill out the obligatory paperwork.

"It's a result of (training colleges) offering iPads and incentives to get qualifications in a super-quick timeline," she said.

Ms Bridge said training colleges were receiving taxpayer subsidies upfront to enrol students. "We'd like a funding model that doesn't encourage people to sign off (on students) just so they can keep up the cashflow," she said.

Assistant Minister for Education Sussan Ley said yesterday that childcare training companies were now required to provide 120 hours of on-the-job training.

"Embedded work experience is a key feature of improving quality so you don't get providers who are fly-by-night or providing incredibly substandard courses," she said.

One of Australia's biggest childcare providers, KU Children's Services, complained to the Productivity Commission about a "large number of low-quality private providers" offering "fast and cheap" training courses.

The Education and Care Advisory Council in Tasmania also told the commission that

“educators entering the sector are often poorly trained and do not possess the necessary work skills”.

The skills quality authority is also investigating complaints that underqualified foreign plumbers are using “tick and flick” training courses to become registered in Australia. Queensland’s Plumbing Industry Council rejected about half the licensing applications from foreign applicants this year, before it was disbanded last month.

Its most recent chairman, Master Plumbers Australia director Bill Watson, said he was concerned that underqualified foreign workers were paying private training organisations to issue trade qualifications in a matter of weeks.

He said the Plumbing Industry Council had refused to license an English plumber after assessing that he lacked 64 competencies.

The plumber returned a few weeks later with a certificate from a private training company, which had been backdated by eight months.

Mr Watson said he had reported the training company to the authority, which confirmed yesterday that it was investigating the allegations.

“They go off, pay money and buy the qualification,” Mr Watson told The Australian.

“We’re talking about an apprenticeship that takes 1000 hours and it’s ridiculous to think anyone could do it in 40 hours.”

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