



Vocational education and training and casual workers in the home and community care sector

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A feature of the Australian labour market over the last two decades has been the growing prevalence of casual employment, which has become particularly important in all service industries. Casual workers are, in general, less likely to have access to training opportunities than those in ongoing employment. In industries that rely on a pool of highly skilled casual workers a major concern is that the pool of skills diminishes if it is not replenished by adequate training. In such circumstances, can casual employment be maintained as a long-term strategy? This paper looks at this question in relation to the home and community care sector, where VET plays a prominent role in developing the skills of workers. It reports on what some employers are saying about training and the skills required of casual workers today and in the future. Our findings indicate a rather more complicated picture than the stylised world outlined above.

Publisher's note

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Introduction

Casual workers are an important part of the Australian labour market. Over a quarter of all wage and salary earners are employed on a casual basis. Casual workers are, in general, less likely to have access to training opportunities. This is not surprising, because in many cases employers take the view that investment in training for casuals has less of a long-term return for the business. For those industries that rely on a pool of highly skilled casual workers, the concern is that the pool of skills diminishes if it is not replenished by adequate training. These concerns led us to ask the question: How will employers who are highly reliant on casual workers meet their ongoing skill needs, in the light of Australia's demographic challenges and the global demand for skilled workers.

This paper considers this question in relation to the home and community care sector. Some background information is provided on the growth in casual employment and the reported level of training undertaken by casual workers. We then focus on the home and community care sector, where vocational education and training (VET) plays a prominent role in developing the skills, and where casual employment is relatively high. Based on a small number of interviews, we report on what employers are saying about training and the skills of casuals. Our findings indicate a rather more complicated picture than outlined above and suggest that perhaps the employment of casuals is not a big issue from a skills point of view.

Characteristics of casual workers

The 'traditional' working arrangement of a full-time job, with an ongoing wage or salary, regular hours and paid leave is now less common in Australia. Other forms of employment include part-time, casual and contract-based employment. This paper is concerned with casual employment becoming more common.

There is no standard definition of casual employment. Nevertheless, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has tended to define a casual employee as someone who is not entitled to either paid sick leave or paid holiday leave (such workers often receive 15–25% pay loading in lieu). However, this does not encompass attributes typically associated with casual employment, such as precariousness of tenure and variability of hours and earnings. The ABS has only recently begun using a category of worker it describes as 'self-identified casual' and has shown that there is considerable overlap with those employees who had no leave entitlements—89% (ABS 2005).

In this paper, casual worker and casual employee refer to someone not entitled to paid holiday or sick leave, while any other employee is described as ongoing. Ongoing employees are entitled to paid holiday leave or paid sick leave (or both) in their main job.

Casual employment has grown in importance in Australia over the last two decades, rising from 19% of all wage and salary earners in 1988, to 26% in 1996, and with a small increase since then (Kryger 2004). However, this is more than double the average of 12% 'temporary'¹ employment

¹ Campbell and Burgess (2001) warn that the data on 'casual employment' in Australia is not a direct equivalent to the categories used for 'temporary employment' in other countries. Many casuals in Australia do have long-term and regular jobs. In August 2003, 57% of the 1.9 million casual employees in Australia had been with their employer for 12 months or more, compared with 83% of the 5.6 million ongoing employees (ABS 2005).

for the 30 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD 2002). Only Spain, where nearly a third of the employees are on 'temporary' contracts, has a higher proportion of 'temporary' employment. In 2004, there were two million people employed in casual jobs in Australia (ABS 2006).

The increase in casual employment in Australia corresponds with the trend away from the production of goods, towards the provision of services, where part-time and casual work have always been more important. Although traditionally used in the hospitality and retail industries, casuals have become increasingly important in all service industries, including property and business services and community services and health.

The growth in casual employment has been driven by employers, who increasingly seek to run their operations as efficiently as possible. Casual employment provides flexibility, as employee numbers can be increased or decreased in line with the needs of the business, especially seasonal work demands. For many employers it can be cheaper to hire casuals because they are not entitled to non-wage benefits, they are not restricted to a minimum number of hours per day, and their dismissal can be achieved without severance payments (Tucker 2002).

Employers may also choose to use casual employment for:

- ✧ accommodating absences of ongoing employees
- ✧ trying out workers before engaging them as ongoing employees
- ✧ 'buying in' specific skills and knowledge. (This implies that the onus is on the casual employee to come fully equipped with the necessary skill set.)

Aligned to the increased use of casual employees is the increased employment of temporary workers from employment agencies. This practice is common in many industries, and labour hire agencies have emerged as important intermediaries in the labour market.

Industry and occupations

Service industries as a group tend to employ casuals more than do most other industries (ABS 2006). In August 2004, over half of the employees in the accommodation, cafes and restaurants industry were in casual employment, as were more than two-fifths of employees in the retail trade and cultural and recreational services, with around a quarter in property and business services, personal and other services, and health and community services (ABS 2006). There were two non-service industries with a high proportion of casual workers: the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry, which is largely seasonal work and has over half its workforce in casual employment; and the construction industry, which experiences marked fluctuations in demand and has a quarter in casual employment.

Casuals predominate in lower skill occupations. Over half of elementary clerical, sales and service workers were casual, as were nearly half of labourers and related workers. Conversely, the lowest proportions of casual employees were found in the highest skilled occupations groups: managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals (ABS 2006).

Personal characteristics

Although young people (aged 15–24 years) made up 21% of all employees in 2003, they comprise 40% of casual employees (ABS 2005). Young people made up almost half the employees in the retail industry and two-fifths of those employed in the accommodation, cafes and restaurants

industry (48% and 41%, respectively). The health and community services industry had close to the national average of casuals (25%), without a young workforce.

While many young people are seeking flexible working arrangements in order to balance study or non-work activities, others may involuntarily find themselves in 'non-standard' or 'precarious' employment and moving between different types of employment states, and in and out of employment. This instability can make it difficult for individuals to engage in formal training or gain recognition for their skills and talents.

If casuals with low-level skills do not upgrade their skills, they may become more detached from the regular labour market. The Productivity Commission (2006) investigated this issue and found that casual employment may be a 'stepping stone' to full-time employment. It found that a casual employee working full-time has a probability of becoming ongoing of 17 percentage points higher than that of a casual working part-time. It found casuals employed in health and community services have a probability of becoming ongoing of between 10 and 61 percentage points higher than in accommodation, cafes and restaurants.

Females are more likely to be casuals than males, but the gap has narrowed over time (ABS 2006).

Casual workers and training

There is strong evidence that trained workers have better employment prospects than those who do not receive training (OECD 2006). In addition, training has been found to facilitate transitions from temporary work arrangements into stable employment (OECD 2006). Nevertheless, access to training is distributed very unequally over the adult workforce in all countries; those with the least education and skills participate in much less training.

Those in casual jobs tend to receive less training than those in ongoing employment. This difference remains consistent, when factors such as hours worked, type of job held, or workplace characteristics are taken into account (Curtain 2001). In addition, by far the most common type of training undertaken by casual employees is on-the-job training, whereas ongoing employees receive more training, including structured training courses, attendance at seminars, workshops and conferences, and on-the-job training (ABS 2000).

In 2002 a national survey showed that 47% of casual employees were likely to have undertaken training with their current employer over the previous 12 months, compared with 69% of ongoing employees (ABS 2003). Analysis of the 2004 HILDA² survey gives us more recent information on Australian casual workers and training. Some 22% of casuals reported receiving training from their employer in 2004, in contrast to 48% of ongoing employees (Productivity Commission 2006, p.149).

Richardson and Liu (forthcoming) focus on the ways in which people learn how to be productive workers and examine change in employment modes for various groups of workers and its effect on the level and extent of their skills development. They found that, by comparison with ongoing employees, casual employees are less likely to experience employer-provided training, and the training they do receive is more likely to be basic induction and safety training. They found casual workers get about half the employer-provided internal training and a mere fraction of the employer support for external courses that ongoing employees receive. These authors also note that the total hours of employer-sponsored training in Australia has fallen over the four years to 2005—by 15% for ongoing employees and by 27% for casual employees.

² The Survey of Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia is known as HILDA.

Casual workers in health and community services industry

The health and community services industry has around 20% of its workforce in casual employment compared with the national average of 25%. However, unlike other industries which employ large numbers of young people, it relies more heavily on prime-age adult workers between the ages of 24 and 45 years. In this paper, we are particularly interested in these prime age adult workers and whether they will be sufficiently skilled and continue to be available for casual employment in the future.

In its 2000 survey of the community services industry, the ABS surveyed all employing businesses and organisations providing community services, including personal and social support, financial and material assistance, job placement and support for persons with disabilities, child care, accommodation for the aged, and other residential and non-residential care in both government and non-government sectors. At the end of June 2000, there were over 9000 organisations providing community services, of which 6% were classified as government organisations: 2800 'for profit', nearly 6000 'not for profit', and 550 government organisations (ABS 2001). Over the last decade, while the number of government organisations has remained about the same as in June 2000, there has been an increase in the number of 'for profit' organisations. In addition, not-for-profit organisations have tended to grow in size and significance in the provision of community services.

In June 2000 there were nearly 350 000 employees in the community services industry, 81% of whom worked directly on community service provision (including childcare, aged care and employment placement [for people with a disability]). In addition, there were 300 000 volunteers (unpaid workers) working at some time in June 2000 on community services activities. In terms of employees and volunteers, not-for-profit organisations accounted for the greatest proportion, with 64% of employees and 93% of volunteers.

Changing government policies over the last decade—the move away from more intensive types of residential care towards home-based care—have meant that community care programs have become increasingly important components, particularly in the aged care system. The aim of the Australian Government's community care programs is to help frail aged people and people with a disability to live independently in their own homes and enjoy quality of life for as long as possible. These people gain access to available care services appropriate to their assessed needs. Community care services are provided by state, territory and local government organisations, charitable bodies, community organisations and commercial providers.

The Home and Community Care (HACC) Program is a joint federal and state and territory program which provides basic maintenance and support services for people living in the community who are at risk, without these services, of premature or inappropriate long-term residential care. In 2004–05, national expenditure on the Home and Community Care Program was \$1.3 billion, consisting of 61% from the Australian Government and 39% from the state and territory governments (Productivity Commission 2006). The Productivity Commission noted that, although approximately 68% of the program recipients were 70 years or over, the program was also an important source of community care for younger people with a disability, and their carers.

The services provided include assistance to carers, where appropriate, to support them in their caring role. Assessment and recommendation by aged care assessment teams are mandatory for admission to residential care or receipt of the equivalent 'at home' care programs. The types of services funded through the Home and Community Care Program include, but are not limited to, those shown in table 1.

Table 1 Home and Community Care Program funded services

Services	
Nursing care	Home modification and maintenance
Allied health care	Transport
Meals and other food services	Centre-based day care
Shopping and recreation activity	Respite care
Domestic assistance	Goods and equipment
Personal care	Counselling, support, information and advocacy
Linen service	Assessment, case management and planning

Home and community care sector

We focus on the home and community care sector for this paper because it has a substantial proportion of casual workers and also a high proportion of employees who acquire formal VET qualifications through industry training packages (see table 2).

Table 2 Industry sectors covered by the Health and the Community Services Training Packages

Community Services Training Package covers	Health Training Package covers
Children's Services	Enrolled Nurse/Registered Nurse Division 2
Child Protection	Allied Health Assistance
Community Services Work – Generalist	Sterilisation Services
Community Services Work – Other Specialist Qualifications	Health Support Services (such as Administration Support, Hospital Assistant, Support Services Worker)
Community Services Work – Specialist	Anaesthetic and other Technician Work
Aged Care And Disability Work*	Optical Dispensing
Community Development	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Worker
Employment Services	Massage Therapist
Management	Aromatherapist
Social Housing	
Youth Work And Juvenile Justice	

Source: Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council website

* Community Services Training Package included a Certificate III in Home and Community Care in 2003.

The 2000 ABS survey indicated that the home and community care sector comprised nearly 2500 non-residential care organisations, of which 98% were not-for-profit organisations (ABS 2001). We can surmise that the home and community care sector uses a substantial number of casual workers and unpaid workers or volunteers, in line with the community services industry as a whole—where national workforce data are available to verify this claim.

A national survey of personal care workers in residential care found that this sector included a high level of non-standard employment (Richardson & Martin 2004). This survey provides the only relevant national workforce data available for comparison with the non-residential or home and community care personal care workers. It found that, in 2003, the total direct care workers employed in aged residential care in Australia had the following characteristics.

✧ Over half were employed as personal carers (67 000).³

³ Total was 116 000 employees, of whom 25 000 were registered nurses, 15 000 were enrolled nurses, and 9000 were allied health workers (mainly diversional and recreational officers). Respondents were given the following definition of personal carers: personal care attendant, assistant or aide, personal care worker, assistant-in-nursing, and others. They are workers, other than licensed nurses, who provide personal care to residents as a core part of their job. Allied health workers were other direct care workers, including diversional and recreational officers and allied health professionals (Richardson & Martin 2004, p.2)

- ✧ This group of personal care workers had the lowest proportion of permanent full-time employees (8%) compared with registered nurses (18%) and the total direct care sector (11%).
- ✧ Agency and contract staff supply a small proportion of direct care labour in aged care facilities, with around 3% of all shifts being performed by these workers.
- ✧ The most likely qualification attained by personal care workers was a Certificate III in Aged Care.
- ✧ While the direct care sector workforce has a high turnover of staff, this was particularly true for personal carers. (An estimated 25% of personal carers in residential care have to be replaced each year by their employer.)

From an aged care workforce survey conducted in Queensland, we also note that, ‘although they undertake essentially similar work roles in different settings, 40% of Direct Care workers in community settings are employed on a casual basis compared to only 17.8% of the Assistants in Nursing and Personal Care Assistants [group] employed in hospital or residential settings’ (Queensland Community Services & Health Industry Training Council 2005, p.10).

Personal care workers make up the majority of the residential and community workforce (particularly in aged care), while registered nurses and enrolled nurses are involved in more specialised care. Booth et al. (2005) focus their research in workplace training practices on personal care workers in residential care facilities. They found that workers need training in areas such as manual handling, communication and negotiation skills; dealing with challenging behaviour; and assisting with medication.

We focus on the community care workforce through the Home and Community Care Program providers. In the community care workforce, personal care workers were likely to be the most vulnerable group, as the national Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2006, p.26) has noted:

Personal care workers are relatively lowly paid and generally work on a part time or casual basis. In the community personal carers work in relative isolation and face additional health and safety challenges as their workplace is an individual’s home. The impact of low-pay, part-time casual employment and the isolation of their work make it difficult to attract, train and retain workers.

A study of disability services in the Australian Capital Territory, found that 40% of employees were casually employed and another 8% were employed under temporary or contractual arrangements (Disability ACT 2004). The study also indicated that 93% of managers and 94% of coordinators were permanently employed (ongoing employees), while 49% of the support workers were casual staff. This casualisation did not necessarily reflect the level of experience of workers, since 27% had more than 5 years service; 20%, 3–5 years; and 23% less than one year.

A study of the home and community care organisations in Victoria showed that casual employees made up 63% of their workforce, 35% of workers were employed on a part-time basis, and only 2% were employed as full-time workers (Angley & Newman 2002). It also confirmed that direct care workers were predominantly female, middle-aged, and employed on a part-time or casual basis.

A variety of approaches were taken by these organisations in relation to the minimum qualifications required by new employees. These included the following.

- ✧ All workers must have appropriate qualifications prior to employment.
- ✧ Unqualified staff may be employed for all positions but then supported by the employer while they acquired appropriate qualifications.
- ✧ Unqualified workers may be employed for home care but not for residential, personal or respite care.

It was noted that almost half of the organisations required qualifications when recruiting for personal care and respite care, but only a few required qualifications when recruiting for home care.

Our findings

We contacted Home and Community Care Program coordinators in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia and subsequently were able to contact Home and Community Care Program service providers. One hundred and forty-two responses were received to an electronic survey of 880 Queensland providers, of which ten were selected for follow-up telephone interviews. A selection of employers was also made from the list of Victorian providers and seven telephone interviews were completed. These interviews covered the government, non-government organisations, including charitable and community organisations, ‘for profit’ and not-for-profit organisations, and regional and metropolitan providers in Queensland and Victoria (see table 3). While some organisations employed no casual workers, others use casual employment for all their home and community care workers. In between these extremes, the remaining organisations told us that:

- ✧ they use ongoing or permanent employees, except for temporary replacement of ongoing employees
- ✧ they have a core of ongoing full-time and part-time employees, but also use casual workers as required
- ✧ they did not employ casuals beyond three months, after which time they were required to switch to permanent part-time status
- ✧ they use almost entirely unpaid workers or volunteers.

Where casual employment was used by home and community care providers, interviewees indicated that, while the manager, coordinators, finance and administration staff may be ongoing employees, casual employees were used for most service provision, especially personal carers, cleaners, drivers, gardeners, tradespersons, and social visitors (see table 4).

Many respondents noted that casuals were employed to do the same work as ongoing employees. For example one respondent noted:

All casuals are engaged in personal care [such as disability support]—no different [work] to permanent part timers. (Private ‘for profit’ provider)

On the other hand, another responded:

Many of them [casuals] are almost permanent—they work the same shifts and visit the same clients each time. (Private ‘for profit’ provider)

Table 3 Sample of Home and Community Care Program service providers contacted for telephone interviews

Pro- vider no.	Type of organisation	Location	Size/total no. of staff	Ongoing- full-time	Ongoing- part-time	Casual- full- time	Casual- part- time	Volun- teers (part- time)
1	State government not- for-profit	Cairns Queensland	Branch 49	1	32 (all on contract)	0	16 (all on contract)	0
2	Church based not-for-profit organisation	Brisbane (head office) Queensland	State- wide 2000	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Mostly casual	Not stated
3	Not-for-profit, auspiced by local council	Central Queensland	Local council area – 5	1	0	0	4	0
4	Charitable not- for-profit	Gold Coast Queensland	Branch 38	3	6	0	2	27
5	Community based not-for- profit	North Queensland	Regional branch 46	1	0	0	34	10
6	Church-based not-for-profit	Fraser Coast Queensland	Regional branch 72	10	49	0	7	6
7	Church-based not-for-profit	Brisbane Queensland	Branch 23	3	8	0	1	11
8	Charitable not- for-profit (phone- based support)	Queensland	State- wide 255	2 (plus one on contract)	2	0	0	250
9	Charitable not- for-profit	Metropolitan Brisbane Queensland	Branch 76	0	1 (on contract)	5 (prepare meals)	0	70 (deliver meals)
10	Charitable not- for-profit	Queensland	Most of state 200	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Mostly casual P/T	Not stated
11	Private 'for profit' (10 residential facilities and in- home care)	Metropolitan Melbourne Victoria	Whole 200	0	140	0	60	0
12	Church sponsored not- for-profit	Melbourne Victoria	Whole 608	177	299	0	138	0
13	Private 'for profit' (new business)	Melbourne Victoria	Whole 58	1	1 (plus one on contract)	0	55	0
14	Charitable not- for-profit	Melbourne Victoria	State- wide 1500	80	100	0	1320	0
15	Charitable not- for-profit	Geelong Victoria	Regional provider 296	1	5	0	0	290
16	Charitable not- for-profit	Melbourne Victoria	State- wide 110	40	30	0	20	0
17	Christian charitable not- for-profit	Goulbourn Valley Victoria	Home care division 350	0	77	0	273	0
Total			5869 (100.0%)	1070 (18.2%)		4135 (including 2200 staff from providers #2 and #10) (70.5%)		664 (11.3%)

Table 4 Jobs performed by casual (and volunteer) employees in home and community care

Jobs performed by ongoing employees or those on contract	Jobs performed by casual workers	Jobs performed by volunteers
Management	Home care	Transport
Service coordination	Personal care	Childcare (disability)
Staff supervision	After-hospital care	Domestic work
Volunteer coordination	Social support	Domestic cleaning
Finance—accountant, bookkeeper	Disability support	Food preparation
Administration	Community support	Home maintenance
Chef	Client support	
And all jobs performed by casual workers	Respite care	Day service provision
	In-home support	Shopping
	Showering client	Meal delivery
	Administration support	Bus driving

Reasons for employing casuals

Precursor to ongoing employment

Casual employment was frequently used by organisations to trial workers for more permanent or substantive positions. In addition, it was noted that, where it was difficult to find qualified staff for low-paid positions, casual work allowed those whose skills and knowledge were not documented to be trialled. Some organisations using volunteers tended to use their volunteer pool as a resource for recruitment to casual or ongoing positions.

One respondent noted:

We prefer to recruit people as casuals because of the legislation. It's easier to get rid of unsatisfactory people if they are on a probation period as casual employees. If you hire them [permanently] straight off and they are not satisfactory, you've got to go through all of that stress of three letters, informing them, counselling, training, and all that stuff before you can get rid of them. If you can work things out in that three months [before making them permanent], it's great. (Charitable not-for-profit organisation)

Several other respondents also cited ease of dispensing with the services of employees whose work performance was unsatisfactory as a reason for using casual employment.

No obligation to a minimum number of hours of employment

If people are employed as ongoing part-time employees, they have to be guaranteed employment, whereas there is no obligation to guarantee casuals a minimum number of hours per day or ongoing employment. Some organisations cited lack of guaranteed ongoing work and work shifts as the reason they use casuals. For example:

To have employees on a permanent basis, the company will have to grow some more so that I can provide employees with the necessary number of compulsory hours.

(Private provider in second year of operation)

From a home care point of view, yes [casual employment] is cost effective and efficient, because we only had to pay the minimum two hour call out. Then again, because of the nature of our client base, if we roster on a part-timer say, six hours a day, and all of a sudden you get four cancellations due to illness, death, or otherwise, you can't just give them any other work. So suddenly, you may have to pay them for four hours work that they didn't do.

(State government service provider)

Flexibility in hours and rostering employees

Casual employment allows organisations to employ workers for shifts which vary from week to week or one day to another, or for short shifts of work. This flexibility allows organisations to employ people, ad hoc, to deal with the numerous contingencies that arise in home and community care work, such as client deaths and short-term clients; casual employment is also used to replace ongoing employees who take leave.

Some employers also see casual employment as the best means of filling unpopular and awkward shifts that permanent employees dislike (such as public holidays). In contrast, other employers pointed out that casuals are also in a better position to exercise their prerogative to pick and choose the tasks and shifts they are willing to work.

Some employers commented that many workers prefer to work casually due to family commitments or lifestyle choices which require the flexibility afforded by casual employment. They based this on that they had many long-term casual workers. For example:

We have had some [casuals] who have been here 12 years. The average worker has been with us for 3 or 4 years. (Community not-for-profit organisation)

Other employers were of the opinion that the low pay for full-time work was not attractive and that workers chose casual work as the better-paying option ‘up front’. Some noted that their casuals often had other jobs outside their organisation and that staff turnover was higher for casuals than for ongoing employees. For example:

The turnover of casuals is a lot higher than for permanent staff. Permanent employee turnover is 14.9%, casual turnover is 43.8%. (Church-sponsored not-for-profit provider)

However, another respondent noted that the casual employment culture (in relation to training) is generally linked to a lack of commitment by both employer and employee:

But when you are paying out on training you want a bit of a commitment because you don’t want to train them and then find them going straight off to work for someone else because you have trained them well. How you get around that I don’t really know, because when they are casuals they don’t have to give you any notice—but you don’t have to give them any either. (Charitable not-for-profit organisation)

Another respondent spoke of the difficulties casual employees can create by ‘picking and choosing’ the work they do:

The difficulty we have is that [while] we have got casuals who are happy to clean the house and we have got others who are happy to do personal or respite care, they pick and choose. So I believe the permanent part-time agreement will help solve this problem and they will all need to be prepared to do the personal care, do the transport, do the home help, do the respite—all of it, not just pick and choose. (Community not-for profit organisation)

Several respondents alluded to the importance of being able to provide ongoing stable care for clients. For example:

This constant change is no good for the client because they want to always have the same carer coming in [to visit them]. (Private ‘for profit’ provider)

Cost-effectiveness?

Opinions were divided about the cost-effectiveness of using casual workers. On the one hand, those who claimed that casual workers were cost-effective noted that this was so because only actual hours worked had to be paid for, and all clients needed specified services at the same time every day. On the other hand, others wanted stability for their clients and commitment from their employees to make training them cost-effective. Others noted that the casual ‘pay rate was far too

high' and you could not afford to have casuals working 36 hours a week, while others noted that, if they did not offer casual employment, they would not find sufficient staff.

Training of casual workers

Of those employers interviewed, 13 stated that the organisation employed both ongoing and casual employees, and 11 of those also stated that the qualifications required of casuals were the same as for ongoing employees. To carry out personal care duties, employees must have Certificate III in Aged Care, Disability Work or Home and Community Care, plus a current first aid certificate. One private provider noted that potential employees were expected to obtain their first aid certificate and pay for it themselves, but once employed, the organisation paid for the refresher courses and employees were paid for their time to attend training.

In some cases, casual employees can gain their qualification while working on the job. One respondent noted:

No minimum qualifications stipulated but the aim is for most staff to eventually have Certificate III in Community Services either in Disability Work or Aged Care ... If they [just have] some experience in the work such as aged care, I employ them and I train them in the client's home—so I'm doing shadow shifts and I assess what they do and how they do it, I train them on how to use a hoist and how to follow a care plan. After I have trained them and can see they are working very well, I can put them on 15 hours a week and they can do ongoing training with a training provider. So if they don't have any initial qualifications I train them first and then they can follow on with the Cert III. (Private 'for profit' provider)

Similarly, another respondent noted:

Casual nurses need the relevant nursing qualifications [as stipulated by government regulations]. For most of the direct care roles, no minimum qualifications are required. In some roles first aid certification is essential. All mandatory qualifications are required.
(Church-sponsored not-for-profit organisation)

The legislated mandatory training relevant to their job may include first aid, manual handling, infection control, food safety, hand washing competence, back hoists and wheel chair competence, fire awareness, building evacuation, medication management, workplace health and safety, rigid vehicle licence, and documentation and risk management.

While casuals are required to receive the mandatory training, differences for casuals were noted in regard to 'sending them to do a certificate III at TAFE'. One respondent noted:

Everyone receives some training. We don't differentiate between casuals and part timers. When we are offering training for staff everybody attends, it's compulsory ... They are paid to attend. Two or three times a year we might have a training day when we bring everybody off the job, they come in, they get paid to attend and we would bring the training to them ... The only difference would be if we were sending them to do a certificate III at TAFE, then, because of the amount of money involved it would normally be offered to part-timers wanting to do higher level work. (State government service provider)

It was also noted by one private provider that:

accessing training, especially traineeships at certificate III and IV qualification levels, was sometimes used as an incentive that encouraged casuals to switch to permanent [ongoing] part-time employment. Casuals were expected to maintain their skills for themselves—they were kept informed of training being offered. (Private 'for profit' provider)

Related to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining casual employees, it was noted that, in general, home and community care workers cannot access the Australian Apprenticeship initiative because they usually work alone. Furthermore, by definition, a casual worker is ineligible for a contract of

training, since the employer must guarantee the trainee a minimum number of hours of on-the-job training and work experience per week for the duration of the contract.

Sustainability of casual employment

Opinion was divided on the sustainability of casual employment in home and community care. However, most interviewees believed casual employment would continue to be a significant feature of the home and community care workforce over the next five to ten years. Some saw it as the reflection of an Australia-wide trend towards casualisation of the workforce, others as the only option for the specific needs faced by the sector because the clients all want their service at the same time of the day (such as 8.30 to 9.30 in the morning).

Several respondents saw the possibility of an industry shift from casual towards ongoing part-time employment. One respondent noted:

I guess it is because we see [casual employment] as not sustainable that we are moving towards permanent [ongoing] part-time. I would hope that we would have everyone over into permanent [ongoing] part-time within eighteen months to two years. It may be a slow process getting our long-term casual people across. [After that] there would have to be a sign-off by a senior manager if we want to employ someone as a casual.

(Charitable not-for-profit organisation)

Another respondent noted:

There is a difficulty generally in finding skilled staff. This makes it even harder to find casuals—for example, in an area where you have got an over-supply, then people are more willing to take up casual work, even though it is erratic, because it is better than nothing. But when you've got an area of under-supply, then the workers have got more of a chance of getting the work they want, when they want, and they will be less likely to want to take up casual employment. In terms of the future, because of the skill shortage in the area, it is going to be difficult to get good casuals. Also, the ageing population is going to increase the demand for workers in the field as well.

(Private 'for profit' provider)

On a slightly positive note, one respondent suggested that, with the trend towards gradual rather than abrupt withdrawal from the workforce by workers around traditional retirement age, there could be greater numbers of people considering working in a part-time or casual capacity in their later years.

It's difficult to say which way will go. With an ageing workforce, there may be more people nearing retirement who will seek to go into casual work as they seek to ease down their employment level. So that would help the situation. On the other hand, with an ageing population there are going to be more and more people needing support in the community.

(Private 'for profit' provider)

Here again, several respondents highlighted the fact that many workers preferred to remain casually employed, even when offered the opportunity to become ongoing employees. One respondent stated:

[The sustainability of casuals] is difficult to predict. There is certainly an attraction for staff to be employed as casuals within this industry and this is likely to continue to be the case in the future. Our organisation [at last count, about 30% of staff were casuals] actively promotes the transfer [from casual] to permanent [ongoing] part-time employment for home care staff and will continue to do so. Permanent [ongoing] part-time status provides home care staff with some security, including agreed minimum hours and the ability to take leave and not be out of pocket.

(Charitable not-for-profit organisation)

Conclusions

The organisation of work and the nature of consumer demand in home and community care lends itself to flexible employment arrangements. Casuals are usually more cost-effective than ongoing part-time workers in delivering flexible services, since minimum hours of work per week do not need to be guaranteed.

Some home and community care employers prefer the flexibility of casual employment. Others are frustrated with how casuals pick and choose their hours of work and so prefer ongoing employees to cover all the hours and tasks required and provide the continuity of staff that their clients need.

The home and community care sector is distinct in having older casual workers. Some casuals prefer the flexibility and choice of hours that casual employment provides, but others would prefer more regular and additional hours of work. However, they may not be able to find suitable alternative employment.

Many casuals, in particular personal carers, are doing the same work as ongoing employees. Therefore, casual employees need the same training as employers provide to ongoing employees in equivalent occupations.

Occupational rules and government regulations require employers to either hire qualified workers, or train new recruits and provide ongoing mandatory training. This, along with a tighter labour market and growing consumer demand for home and community care, is likely to have two effects:

- ✧ more training for casual workers
- ✧ a shift away from casual towards ongoing part-time employment.

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