



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

**INQUIRY INTO CHILD CARE AND
EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING**

DR W CRAIK AM, Presiding Commissioner
MR J COPPEL, Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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DR CRAIK: Firstly, good morning, everyone, and welcome to the public hearings for childcare and early childhood learning. My name is Wendy Craik and I'm the Presiding Commissioner on this inquiry. My fellow Commissioner on this inquiry is Jonathan Coppel.

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The purpose of this round of hearings is to facilitate public scrutiny of the Commission's work, to get some comments and feedback, particularly to get people on the record, which we may draw on in the final report. Following this hearing in Perth, there will also be hearings in a number of other locations around Australia. We expect to have the final report to government in October this year and, following delivery of the report, the government has up to 25 parliamentary sitting days to publicly release it.

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We like to conduct these hearings in a reasonably informal manner but I remind participants that a full transcript is being taken, so we don't take comments from the floor because they won't be recorded effectively. At the end of today's proceedings, there will be opportunities for people who wish to do so to make a brief statement, and obviously people are able to submit further advice, if they choose to do so, as a result of things they hear said today.

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Participants are not required to take an oath but should, of course, be truthful in their remarks and participants are welcome to comment on issues raised by other submissions as well as their own. The transcript will be made available and published on the Commission's website, along with submissions to the inquiry. If there are any media representatives here today, some general rules apply and could you please see one of our staff, if you haven't already?

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(Housekeeping matters)

Now I would like to welcome Amy Evans. Thank you, Amy.

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MS EVANS: Hello, everyone. I am Amy Evans. I am a nanny by trade. I've been a sole trader nanny for over two years and am currently setting up a nanny agency. I'm here to tell you why I think that we should bring in subsidies for nannies and the benefits that it can have on both children and the family household, as well as the government.

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Our workforce is changing. We know that we need to bring changes into the childcare industry. We have looked at the option of bringing in longer hours for childcare. I have a background in childcare and I can tell you that a lot of children do not want to sleep at a centre, a lot of children do not want to be away from their family home, where they feel supported and nurtured. This is why I propose that we do bring in the government subsidies for nannies, to support the families at home.

The childcare won't work. I also feel that childcare has a big impact on the rise in childcare or child - what is it called? I'm so sorry.

DR CRAIK: It's all right. Take a deep breath, plenty of time.

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MS EVANS: The childcare crime rate and - you know, they're not at home, they're not being supported and nurtured for the first two years of their life. The first two years of their life are crucial to one-on-one interactions and supporting the children. Having a nanny can help ensure that, while they're being raised, the parents are at work, we can ensure that they are getting the best possible care.

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DR CRAIK: We've got some questions to ask you. How about we ask you questions and then you can give us help? How would that be?

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MS EVANS: Yes. I've got notes but it's just - - -

DR CRAIK: That's all right. Feel free, if you want to add to the response as we go through the questions.

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MS EVANS: Yes. I also wanted to point out that we do have something similar already, where rebates are provided to parents, but they are for parents that meet special circumstances. So parents that work overnight, if they go through agencies at the moment, they are actually able to get government rebates but it's capped.

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DR CRAIK: This is childcare benefit?

MS EVANS: Yes, this is the childcare benefit, but it is called "special circumstances" and they have to apply for it to be eligible. I have worked with families in that sector as well and the impact on those children is phenomenal, compared to them having to be in centre-based childcare, just because the nanny can carry on the child's general routine and have them in the home, doing the things that the parents would do, in their absence, ensuring that they are safe, secure and happy in learning in their own environment.

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DR CRAIK: Thanks. You're obviously very keen on the idea of a nanny, so I guess we'd be interested in your thoughts about what the appropriate qualifications would be for a nanny, if they're going to be subsidised by the government.

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MS EVANS: Yes. I actually am only hiring nannies that have a Certificate III in childcare. I do feel that, if it were to be brought into play, there would need to be a review for a nanny-specific qualification, just because the childcare qualification doesn't cover everything that is necessary to work within a family home.

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DR CRAIK: What sort of things wouldn't it cover?

5 **MS EVANS:** I guess that it would need to have a little bit of counselling,
psychology more so in that because you are dealing with a lot of family
issues. I personally have quite a few parents that will come up to me and say,
"This is what's going on in the family home", just because I'm there, and I'm
there all the time, I know the home, I know the children. They ask me for
10 support or connections to other agencies that they can gain support from for
their own family. Nannies need that knowledge to be able to support the
families.

DR CRAIK: Is that for families on special childcare benefit or is that across
15 the board?

MS EVANS: Across the board, definitely. With that, I think a lot of it is to
do with - depression is on the rise. Families are very high stress at the
moment, with all the changes in the money that they have to spend and
everything to live. They're having to work long hours. They are having a lot
20 of stress, and this stress is having an impact on our children.

MR COPPEL: What sort of families are currently using nannies, in your
experience as a nanny? Are they city-based or are they rural-based?

25 **MS EVANS:** No. A lot of them are closer to the city, high-economical -
income earners, but I do also have a lot of teachers that know what the
childcare industry is like that don't like childcare because it groups children
together and puts them in a very unnatural environment. The stress that it
places on a child to be able to be themselves in a situation where they're one
30 of 20 is astronomical. They're not confident enough to be themselves.

With the special circumstances, it can be children with disabilities,
families that work nights, out of childcare hours, but it generally is parents
that have an investment in their child's raising and they will put out more
35 money for a nanny, rather than having them in childcare.

MR COPPEL: You will have seen in the draft report that one of the
recommendations does propose extending government support to include
nannyng, provided that they meet certain qualification requirements. Do you
40 have any views on that particular recommendation in the report?

MS EVANS: I think it's fantastic. I saw it all over the news, as well,
bringing in the training for grandparents. I support it 100 per cent.

45 **DR CRAIK:** That's if they want to be a nanny and be paid government
childcare assistance.

MS EVANS: Yes, and be paid for it. I support it 100 per cent because, if the government is going to be making an investment in this, they want to make sure that the children are being supported and their development is being supported within the home. So I do support the training.

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DR CRAIK: One of the things in the points you might think about that you gave to us was something about reviewing the success rate of subsidising nannies. Can you talk about what you're getting at there?

10 **MS EVANS:** Yes. Obviously we don't have much to go from in Australia as to whether nannies would be successful. We have a lot of black-market nannies, nannies that are not paid on the books, nannies that are earning \$10 an hour that are just school-aged children. What I'm getting at is, if you want to be able to look at and review how nannies will work and how successful they can be within a family home, then look at the in-home care sector that stems from family day care.

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DR CRAIK: Thanks.

20 **MR COPPEL:** You make a number of other points in the notes that you sent to us. I think you mentioned earlier issues in relation to depression, success rate review, which we've just mentioned, and the positive impacts. You also make the particular case for childcare being more like farming of children. What do you mean by that?

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MS EVANS: Farming of children, the point that I made with that is that you are putting children into one big room and you're expecting them to eat, sleep, do this, do that, when they're told. The EYLF is fantastic, the Early Years Learning Framework, absolutely fantastic and I support it 100 per cent. It cannot effectively be put in place in a childcare centre, to its best. It cannot work with having 20 children in one room. 20 children cannot be recognised as individuals at all times, it's not possible. It doesn't matter how many staff you put in that room, there are still 20 children that are competing to be an individual.

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MR COPPEL: One of the benefits that comes from formal care is that their socialisation skills are developed, which can't happen in an individual environment. How do you respond to that, which seems to be one of the weaknesses of nanny care?

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MS EVANS: That's something that I have, in developing my own nanny agency, made sure is a very, very key element that I do support. Our nannies will be connected together and we will encourage our nannies to have playdates with each other, take the children to playgroups. So we will organise playgroups in different areas and locations that the nannies can take the children to so they can have that socialisation. There is also the option of having a nanny-share, so two families can have their children in one nanny's

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care, and there's a number of children from the two different families that can socialise.

5 **DR CRAIK:** What do you think are the optimum sort of ratios of nannies to children, because this would be something that would need to be worked out in the scheme of things?

10 **MS EVANS:** I think optimum is no more than one to- five. Ideally, the babies - one to four ratio would be fantastic. I have had five children myself and it's only doable because there are a number of children. They range from two to 12. The older ones could do things for themselves. But if you've got younger ones, I think there needs to be a look at how – you know, the reducing the ratio to younger children, opposed to having older children that can do things for themselves.

15 **DR CRAIK:** You can go to one to seven in family day care, I think I'm right in saying, if the children go up to age 13 or something.

20 **MS EVANS:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: I think that's right. Do you think that the same would apply for a nanny?

25 **MS EVANS:** Yes, definitely. It's one individual taking care. It's exactly the same situation, only you're in the child's home.

DR CRAIK: Do you think the homes need to be inspected?

30 **MS EVANS:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: I mean, do you think there needs to be any standards in terms of homes and who do you think should do that? Should that be the nanny agency, if the nanny goes through an agency? Should they take that responsibility? Should it be the regulatory agency or do you have a thought?

35 **MS EVANS:** Yes. I do think houses need to be inspected. I have worked in a few unsafe houses. And they weren't unsafe for me, as an adult, they were unsafe for the children.

40 **DR CRAIK:** Even though they were the children of that household?

MS EVANS: Yes. They could open cupboards to chemicals quite easily. They do need to be inspected and they need to be regulated.

45 **DR CRAIK:** Do you do that now? What do you do now if you think the house is unsafe?

MS EVANS: Yes. For myself, as a self-employed trader, I don't overly do it. I might mention to the parents, you know, "This needs to be changed. That needs to be changed". Through the agency I do go through the home and say, you know, "This needs to be changed. This needs to be changed.
5 We need to put a lock on this cupboard. We need to put this up or put in baby gates so the children can't have access to these things", to cover that. I do believe that if we have these subsidies for nannies, nannies should have to go through agencies to ensure that there is a standard being met, because if you've got these individual nannies, they can't be reviewed and monitored as
10 well as they could be, as if they were coming from an agency.

DR CRAIK: Still, if a person wanted to set up as a nanny independently and met all the qualifications.

15 **MS EVANS:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: What would be the negatives of that, relative to going through an agency? Why wouldn't that be as good as going through?

20 **MS EVANS:** I think because the agency can be held accountable to be assured that there is a third party to make sure that the nanny is providing the high quality care, meeting industry standards. If we don't have anyone regulating that nanny, then we don't know what's going on with that nanny. We don't know if they are providing a developmental program for the
25 children unless they are regulated by a body.

MR COPPEL: You mentioned the developmental program. One of the advantages of formal care is that there is a capacity to identify kids that may have learning difficulties at an early stage. How would that work in a nanny
30 environment or how would we get a sense of certainty that, where there are learning difficulties, they are picked up early?

MS EVANS: Firstly with that, I think by putting them in a group situation, you are only comparing the children against one another. And that's what I
35 am getting from what you're saying, is that we're comparing them. We don't want to compare children to anything. They are individuals and they should be recognised as a person, not as developmental delays and things.

I have personally picked up on developmental delays, due to my
40 training, within a family home. I have had a six year old boy and I have turned around to mum and I've said, "We need to get him screened. I know there's something". We got him screened and sure enough there was something that was recognised.

45 The training that the nannies are provided with will support them within the home to recognise that there is a developmental delay.

DR CRAIK: Do you have any idea as to what the sort of demand would be for nannies in a place like Perth?

5 **MS EVANS:** It is definitely on the rise. A lot of families are opting for nannies over child care and you are finding – I personally am finding a lot of families that are only wanting to pay \$10 per hour for a nanny. So, they are going and finding school-age children. The demand is very much on the rise, just because families don't like child care. They are opting for a nanny, due to the personalised care that a nanny can provide.

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DR CRAIK: When you say they get a school child to do it, I mean, I used to do babysitting when I was a child, you know for evenings and things.

15 **MS EVANS:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: Are you talking about after school, sort of.

20 **MS EVANS:** Yes. So maybe if they were after school, not so much the casual night babysitting. I am talking maybe a Year 11 or just a student that is no longer going to school, you know, 16, 17 years old, just wants a bit of money, and that's all it is for them. Whereas I am proposing that we have these nannies that are invested in the area and they are very much wanting to work in child care to the point that they're going to go get the qualifications.

25 **DR CRAIK:** I guess our recommendation was that if the government agreed to subsidising, that there would need to be a standard in qualifications that would need to be met.

30 **MS EVANS:** Yes, absolutely. And I think, you know, looking at the family day care regulations and the requirements for that, we can probably use that to start initiating how we would set those standards for a nanny, because they are quite similar in that there's one carer working with these children in a home.

35 **MR COPPEL:** One of the other recommendations in the draft report is to enable au pairs to work with a family for a period longer than six months, not to be supported by government payment, but to extend that visa requirement.

40 **MS EVANS:** Yes.

MR COPPEL: Au pairs and nannies are often seen as close substitutes, very similar.

45 **MS EVANS:** Yes.

MR COPPEL: I am wondering if you have any views on that particular recommendation.

5 **MS EVANS:** I do. I value that, you know, we need to try and keep nannies in the family homes for stability for the children for longer periods of time. Being able to provide that nanny for a longer period at home is fantastic, however I don't think it's in the best interests of the children. Those nannies do not have the qualifications that I am proposing that we need. They won't have time to study them before working with the children. They won't be able to provide a developmental program, because they won't be mandated. They won't have a body watching them and making sure that they are meeting Australian standards, which they don't already. I do believe that it is a lot better, beneficial for the children to extend it in providing that stability, but not in the sense of in the best interests of the children's development.

15 **DR CRAIK:** One of the submissions we got after the draft we've just got in the last few days was talking about family day care and suggesting that the ratio is now one to four for young children, and that maybe the ratio should be allowed to be one to five if the family day carer had a diploma level, more qualified. What's your view about that?

20 **MS EVANS:** Honestly, I am diploma qualified and it really does depend on the individual, whether the individual carer can tolerate it. I have worked with teacher trained staff before and their Cert IIIs were running the room. They couldn't run the room in the child care centre. It really does depend on the individual and I don't think that it can really be assessed appropriately, based on their skills and their strengths. They might be a timid person and how do you check that before you set that ratio.

30 **DR CRAIK:** Okay, thanks. Thanks very much, Amy. Thanks very much for coming in.

MS EVANS: Thank you.

MR COPPEL: Thank you.

35 **DR CRAIK:** You can have a five-minute break while we hope that the people from the RDA Wheatbelt turn up.

MR COPPEL: Unless we switch straight to Carewest.

40 **DR CRAIK:** Yes. Unless Carewest is in the room and we could do a switch and go straight to Carewest, if you would like to. We're happy to do that if you're happy to do that. Thank you for being obliging.

45 If you would like to introduce yourselves and state your name, position and where you come from, and, if you'd like to make a few opening remarks, we'd be happy to hear them. Thank you.

MS WHITAKER: My name is Sally Whitaker. I'm the chair of Carewest, which is a community-based not-for-profit peak body here in Western Australia. This is Maria D'Onofrio, who is the treasurer of Carewest. We both run long day-care centres here in Western Australia.

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Carewest has state-wide membership. We were established in 1973 as the WA Association of Day Nurseries, and we have grown and changed as our sector has changed. Community-based childcare has 36 per cent of the early childhood sector and we have rural and remote members. Carewest commissions research; the most recent thing has been the model centres project, which is coming to fruition, with publication towards the end of the year/beginning of next year.

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Some key points from our submission to the Commission were that Carewest members fully support the National Quality Framework as it stands now; we also feel that the ratios in Western Australia are the best in the country, so the rest of the country were being brought in line with us - - -

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DR CRAIK: Nearly every state tells us that.

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MS WHITAKER: There was no reported increase in the regulatory burden from members. We all knew this was coming, so people started making preparation for the changes. We live and breathe the National Quality Framework every day, sitting down in our services with our educators and families.

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The certified supervisors; we had a system here in Western Australia where you had something similar to this. We do think that the certified supervisors is a good idea because it does provide portability between services.

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The Early Years Learning Framework and the framework for out-of-school-hours care provide guidance and validates everything that we do as professionals. I would just like to say that, in Western Australia, we don't call it preschool, we call it kindy.

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MR COPPEL: Like Victoria. It's very confusing.

DR CRAIK: Yes. Thanks very much and thanks very much for sending in some comments and things in your submission beforehand.

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MS WHITAKER: That's all right.

DR CRAIK: One of the comments that you made in your notes was that you thought that a means-tested rebate would impede workforce participation, that you thought it would reduce workforce participation, of, typically, the primary carer, and you were suggesting that a combination of fee-relief-types

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- which I assume means means-tested, like the childcare benefit - and non-means-tested is the best and more efficient way.

5 **MS WHITAKER:** Families do find the whole system very confusing now
- - -

DR CRAIK: Yes. We got that loud and clear.

10 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes, and one thing is means-tested and one thing isn't, so I do think a combination of payments would be a good idea, just to simplify it for families.

15 **DR CRAIK:** Do you think what we proposed, which was a single subsidy, was a good idea? Ours is means-tested - the one we proposed is means-tested.

MS WHITAKER: I do think simplifying it for families would make it better; so, a single subsidy, whether it's means-tested or not, is - - -

20 **DR CRAIK:** Would be better.

MS WHITAKER: Yes. That's really open to interpretation. I just think that, if you can simply the payment system for families in some way, that would be of great benefit.

25 **DR CRAIK:** Do you agree with the notion of paying directly to the provider of the parents' choice?

30 **MS WHITAKER:** That would make it easier for us, as a provider.

MR COPPEL: We also made - in addition to the payment being means-tested, that it be activity-tested in terms of work, looking for work or studying. Do you have any views on the activity-test, the practicality of applying it?

35 **MS WHITAKER:** There are a lot of families where you may not have one parent who's working who are using early childhood services but they're using it not because they're going off to have coffee with their friends and play tennis - they are using it because they actually might genuinely need to have a break because of some health issues or because going into an early childhood service is the best place for their child to be. There is already an activity-test now, so that's not really going to make a huge difference. I think that, if you take away a subsidy for families who aren't working who want to use early childhood services, then you are taking away that universal right for children to have quality early childhood services. I think that everybody should be eligible to use an early childhood service; I don't think you should be discriminating against families just because people aren't working.

DR CRAIK: They'd still be allowed to use them; they just wouldn't be subsidised under what our current recommendation is.

5 **MR COPPEL:** There is an activity test at the moment. Is there an onus on providers to ensure that a family meets that activity test?

10 **MS WHITAKER:** When families come in, they do - the majority of the families that use our services are working or studying, so they would meet that criteria. If you're coming into an early childhood service, generally, you have to go on a waiting list and you would have a question on your form about reasons that you need childcare, and then, using the priority of access, you would give - if a spot comes up and it matches the days and you've got a person who's eligible for that because they are working or studying, that's how you would implement it. Services already use the priority of access, so I don't think you need to have further rules on that.

15 **DR CRAIK:** One of the things that we had in our recommendation in relation to the subsidies was, if children were at risk, the parents didn't need to meet the activity test or the means test, and they could immediately receive subsidised childcare.

20 **MS WHITAKER:** But is that just for children who are already in the care of the Department for Child Protection?

25 **DR CRAIK:** We hadn't specifically defined it. We had the discussion with the ACT Government the other day about it because they were concerned about the ones who weren't in the system. I guess one of the questions we have is, for the children where the parents don't meet the activity test but who would benefit from childcare, what sort of criteria can you develop that enables them to get into the system? Is it possible to develop reasonable criteria so that they can get into the system if they don't meet the activity test?

30 **MS WHITAKER:** For those parents of children who are at risk who are not in the care of a department for child protection?

35 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, or not formally identified as at risk.

40 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes, not formally identified.

45 **DR CRAIK:** Is it possible to think up criteria for - and there are cases where parents - someone might have a health problem and it's really valuable for them to have a rest from the child for a while and for the child to go into some kind of childcare service.

MS WHITAKER: The thing is, you would know that from actually meeting

the families, and - - -

DR CRAIK: Governments are usually not satisfied with that - - -

5 **MS WHITAKER:** I know but you would know that - if you came to my service and you said, "I need care because I've got an illness," then, you could use that as your criteria, but you're not going to know until they come and tell you. It all comes down to knowing your families.

10 **DR CRAIK:** This issue of having the activity test, which would remove the subsidies from a lot of kids who might benefit from being in there, and trying to what are reasonable criteria - if we could think up reasonable criteria, should they be entitled to the same amount of childcare that parents who meet the activity test are, up to 100 hours a fortnight of subsidised care?

15 **MS WHITAKER:** There are a lot of children who come into services because their parents do need that break and you just know that it's the safest place for that child, but you're not going to know that until they come to you and tell you that. You can have a criteria, but you're not going to know until they tell you.

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DR CRAIK: Thanks.

25 **MR COPPEL:** You made, in your opening remarks, the point that you fully support the NQF, and the draft report makes the point that the NQF must be retained, but we do make a number of specific recommendations which address how the NQF is implemented, and one example of that is the ratios applying strictly moment-by-moment through the day; there are provisions or exceptions to that but they're quite strict provisions. One of the

30 recommendations we make, for example, is that this be looked at over a week, for example. There are other recommendations that relate to the ACECQA quality ratings. There are a number of specific recommendations and I'm wondering whether you have any comments on those specific recommendations.

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MS WHITAKER: The ratios - members are concerned about this notion of averaging the ratios out over a week because it will - it could be - the consequences for the children, as far as health and safety go, could be dire because you're waiting till Friday to see what your ratios are going to be, or, if you've got low numbers on a Monday, you send someone home because you can, because you don't have that extra person, so, to save money, off you go. I think that, also, it will just lead to stress on children, stress on the educators and lead to further workforce burnout. I just think that it's a really bad idea. I just don't know why you would think that and why you would

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45 want to go backwards.

I've worked here in Western Australia and I've worked in South

Australia, and the ratios in 2009 were in the babies' room, were one to five, and I had run babies' rooms here and they were one to four. We had 10 babies with two staff, and two extra babies make a huge difference to having eight babies and two staff here. I think that this whole idea of averaging out the ratios is not a good step; it's a step backwards.

We're also concerned about the watering-down of the qualifications.

DR CRAIK: Certificate III?

MS WHITAKER: The Certificate III for birth to 36 months. I just think it's a really bad idea because the children who are in that age group are like sponges, and there's so much evidence out there about what children are learning in those critical first three years, and you need to have the best-qualified people for that. When you are completing your diploma, you do 10 extra units, which gives you the skills to observe children, implement curriculums, evaluate them, plan experiences; it gives you the skills for identifying children with special needs, implementing behaviour programs, leadership skills and management skills. I don't want to take anything away from educators who have Cert III but the diploma is an extra level of training, on top of that, and the difference is huge between the skill level of a Certificate III educator and a diploma-trained educator.

DR CRAIK: We also said that the number of university-qualified teachers should be based on over-threes. What's your view about that?

MS WHITAKER: Are you trying to say that only learning occurs once you're past three?

DR CRAIK: No, we're not saying that at all, but I don't know that you need to be a university-qualified teacher to teach someone, do you? I guess that would be the question. I suppose the challenge we have is that the evidence doesn't show that this qualification or that qualification leads to a better outcome. That's the problem.

MS WHITAKER: I think you really need to go and see some services in action, to see - - -

DR CRAIK: We have been to a couple.

MS WHITAKER: - - - what educators are actually doing in the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework. I think you need to have the best-qualified people, the best people, working in that from birth-to-two and the two-to-three age group, and past-three, but I don't think that you can really accept - and I really don't think that people will accept - to have Certificate III-level staff running their babies' room.

DR CRAIK: Okay.

5 **MR COPPEL:** You will have noticed from the draft report that we're proposing the extension of support to a number of other types of care services, on the provision that the qualifications are there, within the NQF. From what you're saying, are you suggesting that the existing qualifications would be adequate to cope with an extension of services to, for example, nannies or would there need to be something which is more specific to those particular types of providers?

10 **MS WHITAKER:** I think that the term "an approved nanny" needs further definition. Members are curious as to how the use of a nanny would be regulated and how it would be delivered, and I don't know how much take-up there would be if there was to be a formalised arrangement. If it was going to be regulated through a nanny agency, rather than the regulatory authority that early childhood services come under, what sort of training would that agency receive to complete compliance issues?

20 **DR CRAIK:** I think our view would be that it would have to be monitored by the same regulatory agency that monitors all the childcare services. Even if it would go through an agency, there would still need to be - have it monitored.

25 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes. You did say that it could be administered through an agency or a childcare service.

DR CRAIK: It could, but the actual compliance would be done through the same regulatory oversight agency.

30 **MS WHITAKER:** Through the regulatory.

DR CRAIK: The same regulatory agency. Well, our recommendation would say that as other services in this sector.

35 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: One of the concerns you have is about tick and flick training providers.

40 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: Would you like to elaborate?

45 **MS WHITAKER:** I think lots of training organisations popped up to deliver the Certificate III and to deliver the diploma and qualifications for out-of-school-hours' care. I think that services felt pressured to get their staff through as quickly as possible. And so there was a trend to just tick them off

and just to get them through and get them qualified. Staff weren't receiving the right training. I mean you can complete Certificate III online, which I don't think is the best training. In the last two days I have had people come to the service and say, "I would like to go into child care. What
5 qualifications do I need? I can do it online". I have said to them, as an employer I would look at your qualification from an online place and I wouldn't look any further because you haven't received the same face-to-face training. You haven't received the same practical training that you get when you go out on placement.

10

MR COPPEL: So you check the source of the Certificate III?

MS WHITAKER: Yes, I do, because lots of places have popped up. So, if I see something on a CV that I don't recognise that they've got their
15 qualification from, I will investigate to see where that's from.

DR CRAIK: One of the things you said was you're concerned that delivering care in non-standard hours would place cost pressures on
20 providers.

MS WHITAKER: That was with the extended hours of - if child care services were going to be open really late.

DR CRAIK: I see.
25

MS WHITAKER: Then that would be paying staff overtime and that would place extra costs on services, who would pass the costs on to families.

DR CRAIK: What we were suggesting was that there wouldn't be
30 requirements on services. One of our recommendations was to let services choose their own hours of opening.

MS WHITAKER: Yes.

DR CRAIK: So that they weren't obliged to stay open. That was the intent
35 of our recommendation.

MS WHITAKER: Yes.

DR CRAIK: So they weren't obliged to stay open 40 hours a week,
40 whatever, 50 hours a week, 40-hour weeks, whatever it is, yes. So let services adapt their hours to their clientele basically.

MS WHITAKER: Yes.

45

DR CRAIK: Do you think that's reasonable, sensible?

MS WHITAKER: You know, there are lots of services that are open at 6.30 and close at 6.30. The service that I run, we are changing our opening hours to be more accommodating to families. So I think people are willing to change and adapt to their families' needs.

5

DR CRAIK: We had some places that say that, if they're in small rural areas, it might be a bit seasonal. So they didn't want to stay open really long hours or the same hours all year.

10 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: So they could close earlier at certain times of the year when there wasn't the demand for it, rather than having to keep open with not very much custom.

15

MS WHITAKER: I mean that would make sense, but certainly for metropolitan Perth, I think people are looking at their hours and ways to help families.

20 **DR CRAIK:** Okay, thanks.

MR COPPEL: There's just one other point that you identified in your bullet points to us which relates to the national Working with Children care.

25 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

MR COPPEL: I'm a bit curious in a state like WA, which is so far away from the other states, that there would be an advantage in having some form of check.

30

MS WHITAKER: A national Working with Children check does give portability because people don't – you know, we are always being told by our state government how many people are coming to live in Western Australia every week and the pressure that that's putting on our state budget. So, if you wanted to employ someone from the eastern states then, and they work in early childhood services, then they would come with their card and that's something that you don't have to worry about. You don't have to wait for them to go to the post office and get their Working with Children check. I mean a national card would also – as long as there wasn't sort of lessening of the checking of applicants, then I think that that's actually quite a good idea.

40

DR CRAIK: Can we go back to the Certificate III issue, because a lot of people have raised that.

45 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

5 **DR CRAIK:** You won't be surprised. I guess we would be interested to know, what does a person with a university degree bring that a person with a diploma doesn't bring, that a person with a Certificate III doesn't bring, when the research seems to tell us that it's the nature of the relationship, the quality of the relationship between the carer and the child, that's the most critical issue, after the family environment.

10 **MS WHITAKER:** Well, a person with a degree is going to bring a higher level of knowledge than a person who has their diploma, than compared to a person who has their Certificate III. You know, a Certificate III can take six months. The diploma used to take two years full-time, and then you're versus a four-year degree. You learn at a higher level when you have a degree-level qualification.

15 And yes, your relationships with your families and children are really important, but it's that knowledge and thinking that you bring, that higher level knowledge and thinking that you bring to assist families to develop interesting and meaningful curriculums for the children in your service.

20 **DR CRAIK:** Do you think it's possible to – in some states in Australia where they didn't have those qualifications, do you think it's possible to tell the effects down the track, where they didn't have the sort of standard of qualification perhaps that you had in WA?

25 **MS WHITAKER:** I think you would have to commission some research into that.

30 **DR CRAIK:** Because nobody has managed to demonstrate the impact of different qualifications.

MR COPPEL: Except for disadvantaged kids.

DR CRAIK: Except for disadvantaged kids.

35 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: Which we don't have – you know, we agree to - - -

40 **MS WHITAKER:** I am sure that there will be some research out there, and I am sure that we can put it in our submission to you.

DR CRAIK: If there is we would be really interested.

45 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: Because this really has been a real issue, and it's not that we're kind of just being stubborn. It's just that we can't find any research for children that are not – for disadvantaged children, we agree totally.

5 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes. Well, we will find some research and we will put it in our submission to you.

DR CRAIK: It would be very welcome. We would be pleased to see it.

10 **MR COPPEL:** We do have one study, which was this NAPLAN study that looked at the difference between Cert III diploma and degree qualified, and I think there was a noticeable difference in terms of later learning of the kids who were in a room with a diploma, compared to a Cert III. But there was no noticeable difference between the diploma and the degree-qualified.

15 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes.

MR COPPEL: We are aware of that study, but more broadly, other than in the particular circumstances of disadvantaged kids. There's a lot of international evidence which is also focusing on disadvantaged kids. We are aware of that. It's when it comes to the more general population. Apart from this particular study, it's very limited.

20 **MS WHITAKER:** Okay.

25 **DR CRAIK:** The study that was done in South Australia, where they looked at about three or four thousand records, under the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, and looked at things like quality of the carers, the program the carers had, a range of things like that, and the quality of the relationship, and then looked at cognitive and social outcomes a couple of years later, first it was two-to-three-year-olds and then later; the quality of the relationship was the most important, compared with the qualifications of carers or the program. So, yes, if you can find some evidence, we'd be very happy to see it, thank you.

30 **MS WHITAKER:** Yes. I'll try my hardest.

DR CRAIK: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

35 **MS WHITAKER:** No, not at this stage.

DR CRAIK: Thanks very much for coming along and thanks for answering questions. Thanks a lot.

40 **MS WHITAKER:** Thank you.

DR CRAIK: If you'd like to state your names, positions and organisations

for the record and, if you'd like to make a brief opening statement, we'd be very happy to hear from you.

5 **MS BURGES:** My name is Rebekah Burges, and I'm the Executive Officer of Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt.

MS BATCHELOR: My name is Glenys Batchelor and I'm the Regional Development Officer for Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt.

10 **MS WHEELER:** My name is Bobbie Wheeler and I'm the childcare director of a childcare centre called Milly Molly Mandy's, based in Brookton, in the Wheatbelt.

15 **DR CRAIK:** Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

MS BURGES: Sure. The organisation that we represent, RDA Wheatbelt, forms part of the national network of 55 RDA committees that represent regional areas across the country. Regional Development Australia is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, and we exist to develop strength and ensure the long-term sustainability of Australia's regions. A core role of all RDAs is to work across a range of government and community stakeholders to address pertinent regional issues. One such issue that has arisen for our RDA in particular is appropriate access to childcare that suits the unique context of our region.

To provide you with a perspective on the Wheatbelt, our region is situated in the southwest of WA and comprises an area of around 155,000 square kilometres, and we extend out to the northeast and southeast of the Perth metro area. There are approximately 74,000 people that live in the Wheatbelt. As you can imagine, this would not be considered a large population under most circumstances, particularly given the large land mass that our region covers, but the Wheatbelt has the added complexity of this relatively small population being unevenly spread over around 200 towns and smaller settlements and 43 different local government areas. We do have five subregional centres but the largest of these only has a population of 7000 people.

40 Providing education and care services for children in regional and rural areas such as the Wheatbelt is particularly challenging. We have to contend with distance, smaller numbers of children, isolation, limited resources and a lack of access to training opportunity. Furthermore, in regional areas such as ours, there is a heavy reliance on volunteer committees to manage services, and this really impacts on the long-term viability of the services.

45 RDA Wheatbelt has long recognised the challenges of providing childcare in our region and we are now taking proactive steps to address this

difficult issue by developing a regional children's services plan. This project forms part of the state-wide initiative of the Department of Local Government and Communities to develop specific plans for each of the nine regions in Western Australia.

5

In developing a regional children's services plan for the Wheatbelt, our organisation has undertaken extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including early childhood education and care service providers and community members who either currently access services or have a need to access these services in future.

10

From a service-provider perspective, we have found that the major barriers to effective delivery of early childhood education and care services are: understanding and meeting the National Quality Framework requirements; a lack of operational funding support; staff attraction and retention issues, particularly when you're talking about suitably-qualified staff; a reliance on volunteer committee members and the huge demand that is placed on these volunteers; and limited access to training and development opportunities. From a parent or community-member perspective, the major barriers to accessing services are: the hours of operation, the cost of the service; the distance they have to travel to access a service; and the wait-list times.

15

20

In closing, I just want to reiterate that RDA Wheatbelt recognises that this is a challenging and complex issue, and we're very supportive of the efforts that you're making to reduce barriers and improve access to quality and appropriately-delivered early childhood education and care services.

25

DR CRAIK: Thank you. Do you want to say anything?

30

MS BATCHELOR: We're going with that and then we're happy to answer any questions or have a conversation.

DR CRAIK: Okay. Thanks very much; thanks for coming along and thanks for your comments. One of the comments you make, really, is that some services appear to be barely financial viable. Why is that? Is that because there aren't enough children, because they don't charge enough? What is the problem? We've probably got a bit of an idea but if you can tell us what the specific problem is there.

35

40

MS BURGES: I guess a lot of it is about economies of scale and it's about supply and demand. Again, the message around the fact that a lot of these are very small services and those - - -

45

DR CRAIK: When you say "small", what sort of numbers are we talking about?

MS BURGESS: I'm going to throw to Bobbie. The reason Bobbie is here is because Brookton is one of those smaller services that faces many of those challenges that we have identified through our work. Bobbie is at Brookton.

5 **MS WHEELER:** I suppose the smallest services average around 15, maximum, capacity, and they go up to around 60, I think, in the Wheatbelt. However, few Wheatbelt centres are ever full, definitely not for 12 months of the year, and that's mainly due to the economy, mainly farming, and people going away for longer periods of time. Child numbers fluctuate quite a lot,
10 which makes it hard, as managers, for us to maintain the staffing levels for the whole 52 weeks of the year and put money into training people if you can't offer them the consistency of the workplace as well.

15 **DR CRAIK:** In terms of what we propose, the per-child subsidy and then this viability-assistance idea, where, three years out of seven, if you know your child numbers fluctuated, you could apply for a grant to get you over?

MS WHEELER: That would definitely be of benefit.

20 **DR CRAIK:** Would that sort of thing work - do you think that would work?

MS BATCHELOR: I've been having some fairly quick conversations around - we've got over 30 services out there; not all of them are long day-care but certainly that draft recommendation 12.5 is that one around
25 viability assistance. There is sustainability funding. However, the reason that this one has appeal is because it's a maximum of three in every seven years and it's prioritised to both centre-based and mobile services. So, we see that as definitely a way to support that.

30 **DR CRAIK:** I guess what we're trying to find out is, is three years out of seven a sensible sort of number to choose? I guess what we're trying to say is, if the centre is not viable in the longer term, we don't want to keep helping it out - - -

35 **MS BATCHELOR:** I don't want to comment specifically on that - I'm not sure if you do - because, again, we'd have to go back out and have those conversations. Clearly they are small.

40 **DR CRAIK:** It would be useful if you could and then let us know and give us some feedback on whether people think, if you had a child-based subsidy system like we're proposing and something like that viability-assistance grant, that would actually work to enable childcare centres to continue

45 **MS WHEELER:** I feel like, if there was more support for the directors to put together some kind of strategic plan about the direction of the centre over those three years, possibly, that the funding was available - - -

DR CRAIK: That would be part of the viability funding - - -

5 **MS WHEELER:** - - - then, yes, I think that the services could definitely have the time and resources and consistent staffing in order to implement some strategies that could maintain the services longer term and provide the communities with the quality childcare that we are trying to provide all over WA.

10 **MS BATCHELOR:** Again, if there was a set dollar figure allocated, then there is a place to start with budgeting, and that really sets the scene, we believe.

15 **MS BURGES:** Yes. I was just going to further add to that. Some of our services just, literally, are not going to be viable in the long term, so what we're doing now, through our planning process, is trying to identify alternative ways that these centres can remain viable, whether that's sharing resources, whatever it is. I think the point that you make about the strategic planning will really be important because they need to look at other options to make sure that the service can be viable in some way, if not in the current format that it exists.

20 **MR COPPEL:** You identified two factors there on the sustainability of these centres: one is the low numbers; and the other factor was that the numbers go up and down. I'm wondering if you have any sense of the relative significance of those two. Is it the movements up and down that are unpredictable?

25 **MS WHEELER:** The movements up and down are definitely unpredictable. There's no way that we can forecast from year to year the numbers, and the population has such a lot to do with it. Our direct population is only 1000, and that's within the whole shire, but we do service three communities, just with our centre. We're the only long day-care service and we have people travelling 200 kilometres a day to attend our service. There is absolutely no predictability. It's only by raising the standard and educating the communities as to the benefits of early education and then getting services to provide holistic services that provide outside of quality care that these services are going to remain sustainable in the long term.

30 **MS BATCHELOR:** Obviously, we find that very unfortunate because, in order for our region and most regional rural areas to thrive, we need to have those services out there to underpin everything, in particular, our central services - hospitals, police, those types of things - and just the capacity of people to participate in the workforce.

35 **MR COPPEL:** Is there any movement in numbers linked to the rural nature of the economy? Is there any seasonal fluctuation?

MS BATCHELOR: There is and there isn't. I've had a couple of conversations in some of the areas and said, "Is seasonal an issue?" and it doesn't appear to be as much as it used to be - a little bit more settled. A lot of what previously might have been seasonal for shearers and those sorts of people isn't necessarily, and the ones that are coming in are predominantly - appear to be; anecdotal - backpackers or people that no longer have children in their care.

DR CRAIK: Interesting. One of the things you mention in your discussion points is children with additional needs. One of the things that we proposed was that individual children, say, in a mainstream centre, can get a top-up subsidy for up to a deemed cost but also that the provider could get one-off grants for upskilling their staff or for particular equipment and things. You expressed some concern about the once-off nature of those grants. We're not saying once and only once but we're saying that you'd have to apply each time for them.

MS BATCHELOR: Okay. That's fine. We were concerned because, in the past and even through this particular industry, there have been that short-term availability of grants. Again, discussion around communication and people understanding that those grants are available is an issue for us out there but also, then, the capacity to go for those grants and, then again, because of the changing nature of the population out there, it can be a concern. They could miss out, the way we read out; so, that's great, if that's the case.

DR CRAIK: Do you think that sort of system would be helpful?

MS WHEELER: Definitely. The lack of - not only the lack of training, getting people to places like the Wheatbelt can be quite difficult but also just to relieve your staff, to have the opportunity for your staff to actually attend training in Perth, and stuff like that, can be really difficult; so, to have extra funding in order to help them to get these qualifications - and we do have good numbers of children that require that additional support.

MS BATCHELOR: Yes. Most of the services, in particular for children with disabilities, are based around our regional centres and, again, that's probably four or five across the whole of the region, which is, realistically, twice the size of Tasmania. So, you can start to understand that, whilst it may appear that, per capita, there is a lot of services out there, it's the accessibility and the opportunity to do that. Again, smaller areas may only require that assistance on occasion, so you're going to need that capacity to increase skills when that happens.

DR CRAIK: Do you have trouble getting staff?

MS WHEELER: It takes time to invest in your local community. It's about changing the face of childcare and making it a career and encouraging people

to see the potential in what they can offer. I think that there are definitely people in the communities that would upskill. I think it's the responsibility of the managers to excite people and taking childcare on as a career but it's not an overnight fix; it takes years to train people and to build capacity within childcare centres.

MS BATCHELOR: It really has been an ongoing issue, over a number of years, and has been identified, in pretty much the top three, how that occurs. Of course, if people can't access staff, there's no relief. There's a whole of things - there's capacity to train, all of those things, and that really is an issue for us and, in particular, because some of the services are part-time and, again, it's really hard to attract someone to a place two hours from Perth or an area where they can access a whole lot of amenities when they can only come out for three days a week.

The other issue for us, of course, out there is housing; good housing for those professionals. Again, we're trying to look at how we can access those sorts of discussions at a state level, perhaps with Department of Housing, those sorts of things. Other professionals have access to schemes. It would be really valuable to be able to do that for staff at the centres.

MR COPPEL: What about the retention of staff?

MS WHEELER: I think, if you focus your training primarily in your local community, the staff retention is far higher than if you focus on bringing people in from outside areas.

MR COPPEL: You mention that there are very few occasional-care centres in the Wheatbelt area. Is that linked to caps on the number of occasional-care centres?

MS BATCHELOR: We've mentioned that that's an issue but the reality is that, again, regional and rural and the Wheatbelt has changed markedly. In the past, the community really - there wasn't a need, necessarily; there were a lot of people out there that had family around them, grandparents, cousins, aunts, a lot of organised sport, where some of that after-school care, really, was not required. The Wheatbelt and its population demographics is changing and a lot of those people out there no longer have those close family supports, which has become quite an issue. Again, it still comes down to "only required on certain days" because, for example, one day they might have their sport, so you don't need it on a Tuesday, for example. It's very specific and it's individual but, yes, certainly the traditional supports that would have been in place previously aren't out there anymore. I don't want to talk specifically about the capping but there are other issues around that that we will probably go into in a written submission.

MR COPPEL: We make a recommendation to remove caps from

occasional care, so if you can address this particular recommendation, in terms of your response to that recommendation, or maybe you want to do so now.

5 **MS BATCHELOR:** We would prefer not to now.

MR COPPEL: Okay.

10 **DR CRAIK:** One of the issues we've been discussing already this morning is the NQF. Do people have views about the NQF and our - your thoughts about the NQF generally and our recommendation that it be extended to cover all services, like mobile services and all services that receive subsidies; and, secondly, our proposal that, for under-threes, there be no requirement that Certificate III be the qualification.

15 **MS BATCHELOR:** We'd probably prefer not to comment on that specific one. We really focused on what we had looked at across our regional planning and those sorts of discussions. Certainly the NQF is out there, has been a reason for a lot of angst out there; however, I think there is full support for it. There is a lot of understanding of why it's required but, again, we've said that we think we need to build community awareness of what it is and why it's important. Certainly, from the conversations we've had with a whole range of parents, or consumers of that service, they really like to see that there is a standard in place. They're not necessarily happy that a lot of our services are having to run on ongoing waivers. They want to know that, if their child is attending a service, it is providing the care, the support and the education is that it says it will. Is that fair, Bobbie?

25 **MS WHEELER:** Yes.

30 **MR COPPEL:** Could I just come back to staffing? In your comments here, you've made a point about the recommendation that relates to extending the working-holiday visa for au pairs. You say that it may actually result negatively on the potential to work in the Wheatbelt area.

35 **MS BATCHELOR:** Sorry, not sure - - -

MR COPPEL: It says:

40 *Changes to visa stipulations may also result negatively on the potential staff.*

MS BATCHELOR: Was that in our written submission?

45 **MR COPPEL:** Yes.

MS BATCHELOR: Yes, okay. So we put in a submission in February, and

again we've now moved on from that position, I suspect. We deliberately didn't comment on the au pair situation in this one because again it's a little further down the track in that conversation. So if you can just refresh my memory with what we said.

5

MR COPPEL: It makes that point there and I'm sort of linking it to the recommendation which proposed extending the working holiday visa.

MS BATCHELOR: From six to 12 months, okay, yes.

10

MR COPPEL: It sounds like this would have a negative impact on your region.

MS BATCHELOR: I can't see why.

15

MR COPPEL: And I don't understand why - - -

MS BATCHELOR: It was from the perspective of if - negative to extend it?

20

MR COPPEL: Yes.

MS BATCHELOR: Because we were saying that might be a good thing but we deliberately didn't want to comment on that in this particular situation. Yes, in the scheme of all of the things - because we're looking at nannies being eligible as being one of the ways to really solve probably the biggest issue that we have, which is those really small dispersed populations, critical care people that are out there requiring - or essential services requiring shift workers, those sorts of working relationships. So that's where we've said the nanny and having that subsidised, but we're also looking at being hopefully more creative and supporting a system maybe where nannies can be a part of the overall scheme. Does that answer?

25

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DR CRAIK: One of the issues you raised in your opening remarks and in your submission was the voluntary boards or committees that look after child care centres and the problems - we've heard from a number of sources - problems. They turn over every couple of years and so you've got a whole new bunch of people in, so everything changes, but also people get burnt out, and finding volunteers in this day and age when everyone's really busy is difficult.

35

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MS BATCHELOR: It is very difficult. And again that was one of the highest things that have been an ongoing issue for a number of years. People require services and they are having to in some places actually fundraise for a number of years and go through a process that may take up to two-and-a-half years to get a service. The reason, it's a natural attrition because by the time some of them have worked the system to get child care in their area their

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children have moved on, and again it's that ongoing support to those sorts of management communities that's an issue.

5 Most people really just want to be able to access a good service. To actually have to go in there and be on a management committee and make decisions around training, occupational health, ongoing funding for maintenance, those sorts of things, personally I believe that's very difficult. And it really is an additional burden to be working out there, because we've got ongoing commitments because they move on from maybe the service into
10 the P & C, those sorts of things, and again less people doing more things out there is an issue across the board.

DR CRAIK: Have you got the magic solution for this?

15 **MS BATCHELOR:** Well, we think, interestingly, that local government has had to take a lot of that burden on by default, because a lot of these management committees go through, they fundraise, they get the service in place, they might move on or whatever, but quite often when this burnout occurs it's really about the governance discussions. And so quite often,
20 because a majority of our services are community-based and not for profit, the shire ends up taking on the committee under their umbrella, or they provide a lot of support in either infrastructure or in ongoing maintenance.

25 So yes, no real solution, except maybe some sort of overarching body or support, and certainly that whole clarity around all of these rules, regulations, the funding are a major burden because - for example, I had someone, a young professional woman say to me, "I'm due back after maternity leave. I'm on the committee but I don't know whether I can go back in six weeks' time because I'm not sure if we'll have a service", and the
30 only way she was going to deal with that was to be on the committee, go there, get it organised. Yes, it's just an additional burden. So I don't think we have necessarily solutions, but on an individual basis and with some other supports in place it might be manageable.

35 **MS BURGES:** Yes. The other thing, another opportunity is for shared governance structures over multiple centres. So if it's possible geographically - potentially that's probably our biggest barrier because of how big the area is and how dispersed our population is - if it makes sense, it would be good to have shared governance structures for multiple centres so
40 that you are reducing the number of volunteers and spreading it over different areas.

DR CRAIK: Has that been done at all?

45 **MS BURGES:** We're looking at it.

DR CRAIK: Because I heard some places - - -

5 **MS BATCHELOR:** There are some opportunities and administration might be one that would be possibly the easiest one, especially given that they would have a clear understanding of the specifics of this sector, so that would support, as opposed to 30 different people separated out across the region trying to come to grips with somewhat confusing information.

10 **DR CRAIK:** One of the comments you make is that there's only four mobile services in the region but they're key for remote communities. Are they community-based or standalone or government-provided?

MS BATCHELOR: I don't think we've got that many.

15 **MS BURGESS:** No. Okay.

MS BATCHELOR: That's another February one. So again that's an issue in itself because quite often those mobile services are catering to smaller numbers, and at the start of a calendar year - I think we did the January/February - there can be changes.

20 **DR CRAIK:** So there will be less of them now.

25 **MS BATCHELOR:** There are still some mobile services operating but there has been a change, I believe, where we'll be able to possibly look at more flexibility with mobile services possibly coming from some of key services, long day ones that can increase that additionally. But mobile services for a lot of our smaller towns would seem to be a good solution, but again it's how you support those existing long day care services that are full-time to do that, and there's also been some issues around the support that mobile services have been able to get through the funding situation.

30 **MR COPPEL:** Do you support the idea of the support going to families being based on a deemed cost? But you make the point that needs to take into account the variability of cost, different areas. I am wondering how much variability is there in the actual costs of centres or services that you provide. Do you have any idea how they compare with other parts of WA?

35 **MS BATCHELOR:** We haven't looked at that but we do look at - we can say from the cost of living information out there that there are additional ones in other sectors. There has been a recognition that certainly the Wheatbelt and the cost of doing business or at least servicing is more difficult, and there's also other areas where there are additional funds available for some of these essential services because they are hard to staff those sorts of things.

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45 So I guess it's really from the perspective of - and no one is necessarily going to like the cost amount that you come up with, I suspect. However, again that consistency and clarity and that ability to budget going forward I

think would be a major strength, but again we just want to recognise that, yes, the costs are different and it can be borne out through other information to manage services and to do these things.

5 **MR COPPEL:** Do you have any idea on how one would give recognition to differences in costs from one region to another?

10 **MS BATCHELOR:** There are reports that we've been looking at in other regions. We didn't necessarily focus on that in ours but again, like I said, there's already precedents with delivery of other services because of that situation, and again I can outline them for you, yes.

MR COPPEL: Okay, thank you.

15 **DR CRAIK:** Do you have many indigenous child care centres in the Wheatbelt?

20 **MS BATCHELOR:** No, we don't, not specifically. We don't have any budget-based ones. There were several some years ago but they are no longer operating, and in fact we only have four indigenous playgroups in the area, and it's certainly something that needs to have a closer look.

25 **DR CRAIK:** And after hours school care, I think in your submission you said there was only four, I think. There wasn't very much at all, four in the region.

MS BATCHELOR: Correct, because - - -

30 **DR CRAIK:** Before and after hours school care.

35 **MS BATCHELOR:** Yes, because the other issue that we have is that the community actually has to identify a need and like I said, quite often everyone makes do, so someone's child goes to someone else after school. So there's a lot of those informal arrangements that take place. But the fact that a community has to basically decide for itself and put out a message, "Okay, who might require this" and then work through all of that process, has, I suspect in the past, been very off-putting. And again, because we've got a changing nature out there of who's out there and who requires the different supports.

40 **DR CRAIK:** What did you think of our recommendation that principals be responsible where it would be viable and where there's sufficient demands, that school principals be responsible for – not that they would have to commission it or do it, but to make sure it happened.

45

MS BATCHELOR: Can I answer that? I would be – again, I’m not going to say that principals should be responsible because I don’t have a death wish. But the reality would appear to be - - -

5 **DR CRAIK:** Some of them liked it.

MS BATCHELOR: - - - that certainly schools are really quite well placed in our communities. Quite often, they’re the lynchpin. They’re quite often the last service that we retain in some of our smaller areas before population or decisions we lose them.

10
15 We’re also saying there is a slight opportunity because of that changeover to year sevens going next year, that there might be spare capacity.

It would appear that, certainly for after-school care, they’re well fitted to do that, because a lot of those issues are taken care of within that situation of the school’s occupational health, all of those things. The facilities are there.

20
25 We have one at Baker’s Hill, which has only just recently commenced. And again, that’s been because the community has seen the need and then they have worked through the process with an excellent principal and support from the Department of Education.

We see that as definitely an opportunity, but again, I’m not about to say that principals should be responsible.

30 **DR CRAIK:** We were braver.

MS BATCHELOR: I’m not that brave.

35 **DR CRAIK:** Well, that’s been really helpful. Thank you very much for all that and for answering all those questions and for all that information. I thank you for your submission and for coming along.

40 We will take a break now for morning tea for 20 minutes. So, if you can come back in at 10 to 11, and we will resume again with Shona Guilfoyle.

Thank you.

45 **ADJOURNED** [10.32 am]

RESUMED [10.59 am]

5 **DR CRAIK:** We might get going again, so could I welcome Shona Guilfoyle. Shona, if you could just state your name and your position and your organisation for the record.

MS GUILFOYLE: I will just wait until everybody sits down.

10 **DR CRAIK:** Could you please sit down and be quiet. Thank you. Shona, if you could just state your name and position and your organisation. And if you would like to make a brief opening statement, we would be happy to hear from you. Thank you.

15 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Hello. My name is Shona Guilfoyle. I am here in my capacity as a working mother. I work in the energy industry. I have had a range of employers. They have all been fantastic. I am here as a working mother. So, you want me to make my summary of points.

20 **DR CRAIK:** Yes.

MS GUILFOYLE: Thank you very much for the opportunity to present. I really, really deeply appreciate it and I deeply appreciate this report happening.

25 I as a working mother have used a range of different services. My kids are now aged between nine and 13. I come from outside the industry. I don't have any personal rent-seeking behaviour to put on show here today. You're going to see an awful lot more of that on the go. That's not why I am here. I am here because I care about our children, my children and the community's children.

30

The underriding(sic) point I want in this discussion to start to emerge is that if you want women to increase their participation in the workforce, and my understanding is that is the purpose of the report, somebody at some point has to look at the structure of school. Child care is tinkering around the edges. It is obviously trying to encroach. It's trying to creep on to school grounds and take more hard-earned taxpayers' money.

35

I don't want it to take more hard-earned taxpayers' money. I want the debate to look at the elephant in the lounge room, which is school structure. I want to make two points here.

40

Who in this room understands why there are school holidays? Put your hand up. Yes, why are there long summer school holidays?

45

SPEAKER: Do you want me to answer?

MS GUILFOYLE: Yes.

SPEAKER: Because to provide children with the opportunity to rest and recuperate.

5

MS GUILFOYLE: That is so incorrect. The reason is, the reason we have summer holidays, the reason they were put in place - there are no tired children, it was there for the children to work in every daylight hour to bring in the harvest. That is why. It is an historical anachronism. That is why school holidays exist.

10

Let's look at school hours. Do you know what happened in World War II when all the men went to war? I will tell you what happened. When they really - when the government really wanted women to work, when there was no time for inquiries or reports or workplace targets, they changed the rules and they made school work hours. And guess what happened? Women went to work. And guess what happened when the war ended? They changed the school hours back and we all went home.

15

So I am not saying I want school hours to be identical to work hours, but I want the conversation to start about if you want women in the workplace, somebody has to look at school structure.

20

My last point is the current structure of very short hours. It has a bunch of highly dysfunctional effects. Whatever you think about day care, it ends and you've got an entire community of teenage children home unsupervised. My eldest is 13. I personally think that is a really dumb idea. There is no plan in the community whatsoever to do with them.

25

You want those women, when their children are older and more independent, to work. You actually want them to work and to pay tax, put away their super and not be a burden on the community, pay off their HECS, and look after their mortgage. Help them. Work with them. Do not be frightened of the Teachers' Union as being the only reason not to have school in the conversation about women's workforce participation.

30

35

DR CRAIK: Thanks, Shona. We did actually have something in the report about more flexible school hours. It wasn't a big part of the report but we did actually refer to it.

40

MS GUILFOYLE: I truly believe it's the core of it and until we tackle it we will go around in circles, and spend a mountain of taxpayers' money.

45

DR CRAIK: So do you have thoughts about the school day and how the school term should be structured, in terms of hours or weeks

MS GUILFOYLE: I can throw some ideas out there but I would say other people would have great ideas as well. I would like to see there be a maximum of 10 weeks a year. I swear to God, children are not exhausted.

5 **DR CRAIK:** Holiday, I assume you're talking about?

10 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Yes. I would like the school day to go from 9 until at least 4.30. Perfect example, this week our high SES school got given the opportunity for kids to have two afternoons a week where they did sport that finished at 4.30. They freaked. All right. First time it's ever – I've never had a cent of government money. It's the first free thing I've ever had. They were flooded, absolutely flooded with people who thought, "Two days a week, finish at 4.30". But do you know the really surprising bit, the teachers were surprised. They think everybody else finishes at 3 in the afternoon. I swear to God, they have absolutely no idea.

20 So, several days it finished longer. A glide path, we've got economists here, let's do our glide path transition. Let's start. Let's be caring about the low SES schools, not just the high. It's been done in the US. There's a report that came out from the Select Committee in the UK early this year that is well worth the read, if you want to get women back to work, if you want to have their children improve their academic standards. Push them in to longer hours. It is hours on the clock.

25 Kids from low SES schools, when they go home, they do not do homework. Their homes are not conducive to doing homework. You are sending them miles behind the eight-ball before they've even started.

30 What do rich kids do after school? I will tell you what rich kids do after school. Soccer, karate, Brownies, tennis, you name it. What do poor kids do after school? Their mums are at work and they are watching Game Boy or the tellie, or much worse.

35 It is socially divisive, the school hours we have at the moment. Rich people look after their kids. The poor kids are parked. If they're lucky, they're with nana, who gets nothing for it.

40 Underneath that, I will say I am highly supportive of in-home care being paid for by the taxpayer. I had a nanny the whole way through, a girl who went through uni. She was on Austudy. She had a fantastic job with me because I flexed around her hours and her exams. I didn't get a cent. I helped her go through uni. Isn't that a good idea?

45 She did not need – my one-year old does not need early education. My one-year old needs safety, security and love. All right. Let's not confuse - let's not conflate learning with looking after children. In those early years, let's make sure they are safe and looked after.

5 Then when women are old enough to get back to work and the kids are at school, can we look at the structural issues, not just give more money to a rent seeking child care industry. I swear to God I have never met a child that like child care.

MR COPPEL: Just out of curiosity, what did Britain do during World War II to make the school - - -

10 **MS GUILFOYLE:** You know what? It's identical to me meeting my neighbours when there's no fences. It's structural. They changed school hours to line up closer with work hours. That's it.

15 **MR COPPEL:** They lengthened them.

MS GUILFOYLE: That's it. I mean ask any mother, 3 o'clock and 5 o'clock does not add up. It's just maths. It's structural. It's not about the individual. Women have been structurally set up to fail. We have been asked to participate. Single mothers have been pushed off the dole. But I'm with them. I don't want their children unsupervised. I personally think that's a really dumb idea.

MR COPPEL: We talk about after school hour care in the report.

25 **MS GUILFOYLE:** It's a nonsense. Kids hate it. It's a car park.

MS GUILFOYLE: There are a lot of people here whose jobs are in the industry and I'm sure they care very deeply about it, but I personally have not met a child that liked it. That's the truth.

30 **MR COPPEL:** You don't see that as an option to - - -

MS GUILFOYLE: No, because the minute – I come from the energy industry, okay. I am very familiar with rent-seeking behaviour. The child care industry would love there to be more, more, more taxpayers' money. What I am asking you as economists, looking at the structure, looking at the policy, is to take a huge step back as Britain is starting to do, as the US is starting to do and go, "You want women in the workplace. What are we going to do with the children?"

40 It is long overdue to look at the historical anachronism that school is. Do you know, all of us, we had two more weeks of school than the children have now. The Teachers' Union came in. We went from three to four terms. Who signed that off? It's worse. It is worse than when my mother went through.

45

Let me add in. Let me add in. In Western Australia, as part of the union negotiations, we introduced professional development days. As if 12 weeks isn't enough as it is. They can choose whatever school they like. I have three kids at three different schools. Next year I could have 15 different personal development days – professional development days to navigate. My parents have passed away. I am not going to leave them unsupervised. I think that's a bad idea. But there needs to be a conversation, a conversation had about if you want women in the workplace, school structure. It worked in Britain instantly. I mean they wanted the women out. They just structured us back out.

DR CRAIK: So have you raised this with anyone?

MS GUILFOYLE: We've had it at a few barbecues.

DR CRAIK: We're supposed to be looking at this through the lens of child care and I mean there's not a lot of - - -

MS GUILFOYLE: Well yes, but there are objectives stated about increasing women's workforce participation.

DR CRAIK: Yes, but through the lens of child care.

MR COPPEL: And child care is not - - -

MS GUILFOYLE: Well, my statement is, my statement is, stop increasing taxpayer, my hard-earned money going to that industry. Don't spend another taxpayer dollar on it, except for nannies, until – well, my parents have passed away. Okay, so my mum was not an option. All right. And my mum had terminal cancer, so she couldn't go to child care because I couldn't have her around kids being sick. All right. And I gave a student a fantastic job when she was on Austudy and with the HECS bills they have. Frankly, I think it's a good job for a student to have.

So what would I do? I would say, halt, halt more money to child care until we have a sensible, considered, objective conversation about school.

I am not saying for teachers to be paid less money. There's a range of different options. If you had a school that went from 9 till 4.30, it is quite plausible that you had a bunch of teachers that did part-time mornings, part-time afternoons.

There's a myriad of solutions other people could come up with. But it is inconceivable to me that school has stayed off the radar of the conversation about women's workforce participation. They is no holy grail.

Every workplace I have been in, and I have been in five since I had kids, has bent over backwards, has been fantastic, and has been accommodating. It is not just their job. In fact, it's not really their job at all.

5 **DR CRAIK:** So, have you raised it with education ministers or people like that?

10 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Look, I've written off a few letters obviously. I fully understand that there is a structural divide between Commonwealth and State. Nonetheless, there's COAGs, there are vehicles at which the conversation start. I say to my children it is not going to change in my time, but I want it, I want it to be better for them than it has been for every woman I know who is not a teacher.

15 And in my generation, when I was a child, smoking was everywhere. Never in a hundred years would I have believed it would change so must so fast when the penny dropped, when people finally got - we're all looking over here. If we want to go back to work, let's look here, let's have the conversation. I've got ideas about school structure. I'd like to see 10 weeks. 20 I'd like to see one week, one week, one week, six weeks or one, two, one, five with a week of PD. I think the week of PD has to be at least considered as part of it. And the teachers' union needs to consider that there are other working women.

25 **DR CRAIK:** I think we're clear. I think you have raised the issue loud and clear.

30 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Yes. What are your views on the avenues for putting school on the radar of the Federal conversation?

35 **DR CRAIK:** I guess in terms of - we've only got until the end of October to do this report, so we'll look at what we can look at and go from there. It's the report that you referred to, this British report.

40 **MS GUILFOYLE:** It came out in January, yes, and they're really looking at the fact that low SES kids - - -

45 **DR CRAIK:** If you have any more details on the actual report, if you could give them to Mark or - - -

50 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Sure.

55 **DR CRAIK:** That would be - - -

60 **MS GUILFOYLE:** The research is clear. For the low SES kids, they need to be at school longer if they're to have a fighting chance, because the high SES kids have stimulating activities out of hours and they don't.

DR CRAIK: And we'll take your comments on board.

5 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Okay. I guess I've just got one more question I'd
really like to make clear, that I gave - as did many of my friends - great jobs
to students. There is no way that they could afford as young students on
Austudy a Cert III at the full fees, and I wouldn't require it. I would like you
to consider some methodology of offsetting their HECS or some
10 methodology whereby they can look after kids. Those young kids do not
need to be in a learning environment. They need to be safe and loved.

DR CRAIK: So thank you. Thanks very much for coming along.

15 **MS GUILFOYLE:** Absolute pleasure. I hope you really think about
it.

DR CRAIK: You have certainly raised your issue for us. Thank you.
Moving along, is Rhonda Roe here? Once you're comfortable, if you could
give us your name and your position, your organisation, and if you'd like to
20 make a few brief opening remarks we'd be happy to hear them.

MS ROE: Yes. May I read, because I'm kind of nervous?

25 **DR CRAIK:** Of course. No, you may read.

MS ROE: I didn't expect all these people to be here. So my name is
Rhonda Roe and I run a small business called True North Education and
Training, and I believe we can lift the standard of early childhood education.
If you don't mind, I will read.

30 Thank you for the opportunity to come today. I am a teacher, wife,
mother, daughter, daughter-in-law - mother-in-law, I forgot that one -
grandmother, volunteer, a reader of Parliamentary reports and Hansard, and a
proud Rotarian.

35 I am appearing before this committee today because I have an agenda.
I thank you for the opportunity to speak in a public forum about my private
quest. I want every child in Australia to learn to read with Jolly Phonics. I
must at the outset declare a commercial interest in Jolly Phonics because my
40 business, True North Education and Training, derives income from sales of
Jolly Learning's products and online training services.

45 In the 44 years since I enrolled at Graylands Teachers College in 1970,
I had wondered why governments do not endorse commercial reading
schemes. The Education Departments of Australia seem to like home-grown
programs, rather than searching the world for evidence of what works
wonderfully well and adopting those.

5 The process of learning to read is essentially the same for an Aboriginal child in Perth, Western Australia, as it is for a child in Perth, Scotland. The processes involved in beginner reading are universal for all ages, all ethnicities, all socioeconomic groups, and all genders. I maintain that if medicine used the same drug trial testing methods as education testing of theories and programs, we would all be long dead. Randomised control trials, the gold standard of education research, are rarely required for a national rollout of an education initiative.

10

May I direct you to page 1 of a Parliamentary Hansard from a Senate reading, reference, Academic Standards of School Education, 17 May 2007, where the first witness, Professor Max Coltheart, in his opening statement says:

15

Our submission is specifically about the early stages of education, namely learning to read, on the assumption that if you do not succeed in learning to read in the early stages of school you are not going to profit well from further education. My colleagues and I have been concerned for a number of years about the poor reading abilities of primary school students in Australia. Eventually we did something about this in 2004, writing to the Minister, Brendan Nelson, asking him to institute an inquiry into the teaching of reading in Australia. The details are in our submission. Eventually that inquiry was constituted. It had terms of reference to do with a literature review on what we know about how children learn to read, a survey of how much of this knowledge is getting into teacher training curriculum, and information about how much of the knowledge has been put into practice in classrooms. This committee reported in December 2005 and its report identified many difficulties with the teaching of reading in Australia, and made 20 recommendations concerning how the situation could be improved. Since then almost nothing has been done to implement its findings.

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35

We are talking 10 years ago.

40

In particular, the report identified serious deficiencies in teaching training courses in Australia. All agreed that the curricula for such courses contain too little about reading, about teaching of reading, and about effective methods for teaching reading. Some curricula contained no material of that sort, and one of the most important recommendations was that there should be changes to the teacher training curricula in Australia. As far as I know, that has not happened at all.

45

On page 3 the chair asked, "So would you say that there has been little or no advance in the practical curriculum since that inquiry was held?" "No advance at all." The chair again, "Do you think that a national early reading

curriculum based on the findings of that committee could significantly improve the teaching of reading?" "Absolutely." The chair, "And what do you think the broader effect would be on education in Australia?" This is the rub:

5

Then we would have very few nine-year-old children who are not functionally literate. They may not be avid readers but they are functionally able to cope with reading. That is what we want and there is no reason why the first two or three years of schooling should not produce that for almost every child.

10

For me, the killer question and subsequent answer came on page 7, where Senator Fifield asked Professor Coltheart the following question:

15

SENATOR FIFIELD: You mentioned that there are commercially-available products that have been scientifically validated. Given DEST would not allow those to be mentioned or referred to, would you mind telling us what they are?

20

Professor Max Coltheart replied:

The five that are very popular and are currently on sale vary in how scientifically valid they are. Jolly Phonics is a very good method for teaching phonics that has been independently evaluated; that is, scientists who have nothing to do with the Jolly Phonics organisation have worked in classrooms and studied the effects of Jolly Phonics. Then there is the Spalding method, which is also available in Australia, which has also been scientifically evaluated and shown to be effective.

25

30

Professor Max Coltheart goes on to describe other programs in his testimony. There is much to learn about education from this Senate Committee's Hansard.

35

Lastly, I have a comment to make about who we should believe. Associate Professor Mem Fox, a very popular and influential writer and educator in Australia, writes, in the article "The Folly of Jolly Old Phonics", sentiments about Jolly Phonics and the Spalding method that are the exact opposite to Professor Max Coltheart's testimony. The Folly of Jolly Old Phonics can be accessed on her website.

40

Mem Fox writes:

Do we want children's whose backgrounds, both rich and poor -

45

Let's get that clear. This is not about monetary disadvantage; this is about read-aloud disadvantage.

Do we want children whose backgrounds have lacked books to be resurrected into literacy in our classrooms or crucified on the cross of phonics?

5

I certainly know which I would choose. In my second presentation, tomorrow, I'll be explaining to you in detail your vital role in making this happen.

10 For me, I value Professor Max Coltheart's opinion and I choose Jolly Phonics.

DR CRAIK: Thanks very much, Rhonda.

15 **MS ROE:** I did leave out a bit but I thought it was too long.

DR CRAIK: That's fine. Yes, I was about to wind you up. Thank you; thanks very much for that.

20 Given this program, what are you suggesting in relation to our inquiry? What point are you trying to get us to take on board in terms of the terms of reference of our inquiry?

25 **MS ROE:** My Rotary Club, the Rotary Club of Perth, gave me the honour of setting up a project. I didn't get back much money; I ended up with \$4000 and I shared it amongst six schools. Those schools were schools that I knew had Jolly Phonics and they were working towards a much better curriculum for their pre-primaries. I took some of the members out to Dianella Heights Primary School, which is in a reasonably good socioeconomic area, and then,
30 after lunch, we went out to Westboro Primary School, which is not in a high socioeconomic area, and the results were exactly the same. So, I don't believe, and I never have, that socioeconomic status or area has anything to do with good teaching and high-quality phonics work or learning. Children
35 who are poor, if they are given learning that is fun and musical and activity-based and they're singing and dancing and playing and learning, learn just as fine as any child from the higher socioeconomic group.

We did that. Westboro chose Clayton View in Midland, which is a very, very poor little school. When they run a fundraiser, nobody has any
40 money, so they don't succeed. I took out a great big box of Jolly Phonics, it's called the Classroom Kit, and the principal couldn't believe that somebody had been so wonderful. There was Ballajura Primary School. I asked them for a small country school and they chose. I asked Dianella Heights for a remote school and they chose Kununurra District High School.

45

The results were fantastic right through and my Rotary Club said to me this year, "We'll double the money. We want more schools." I said, "Well,

5 why don't we go back on the schools that we've already done and do a day-care connector program, where the school uses its facilities? We'll give them 500 bucks to buy some things for the parents who turn up. Use your school and your expertise to show day-care centres what Jolly Phonics is all about. They all agreed.

10 Then I was asked to choose one more school for the majority of the money for this year, and I chose Tranby Primary School in Rivervale because, in 2008, when the NAPLAN was done for the very first time, they had the worst results. It was a school that was a normal school but it was so appalling that the numbers dropped to 80 students. When you've got 80 students on a per-student funding model, you don't have very many resources, but they had a great team of young, forward-looking, enthusiastic - administration team and they built those numbers up to 220. When I was in the school, I said, "Oh, you don't have a fence around your pre-primary," and they said, "Well, no, the kids kept on climbing over it to get to their brothers and sisters, so we took the fence down," and I went, "Yes"; somebody using a bit of nous.

20 The other thing I asked was, "Where's the rubbish?" and he said, "There is no litter in this school." "Where's the noise?" "No, we don't have noise either," and I knew, standing there, that that was the school I wanted to support. The pre-primary kindy connector to day-cares will go on in that school to. I'm very proud of my Rotary Club.

25 **DR CRAIK:** In terms of what you're trying to get us to suggest might be a good thing, what's that?

30 **MS ROE:** Jolly Phonics teaches virtually every child how to read; there is no problem. In West Dunbartonshire in Scotland, a psychologist, Tommy MacKay, set about a 10-year project of reducing their 40 per cent adult illiteracy to zero, and it worked; they did that. What was so strange about it - they did the Jolly Phonics thing and then they did other things and they did a parent survey and then they were asked to do something that had never been done before, and that was a declaration study, where you had these little children in their classrooms saying, "We're little readers and we're fantastic and we're going to learn how to read" and all the positive affirmations, in a jiggy sort of thing - they were virtually singing it - and that worked better than anything else.

40 Affirmations are free, they don't cost a cent, and they work extremely well. Where did we lose that? We used to say that to kids in 1960 and 1970 but it's gone. I think everyone's got their head down and their tail down and "It's all just too hard" and "We have to do all this remedial stuff" and "We have to spend a fortune on reading recovery" and "We have to do this" and "We have to do that." None of that's important; it's the relationship between the teacher and the child. Really, if you can reinforce a relationship between

the parent, the community, the teacher and the child, you'll have success; you don't have to spend a fortune - you don't, in fact, have to spend anything - to make that happen.

5 **DR CRAIK:** What do you recommend that we do? We make recommendations mostly for the government, so what sort of thing are you suggesting we do?

10 **MS ROE:** Two things. We should be following England. They did a study in 2009. There was a rollout of reading recovery that was going to go on in that country. It had been recommended by KPMG; whatever they were doing in education I don't know.

15 **DR CRAIK:** Making money.

20 **MS ROE:** It was decided that 20 per cent of children in England would get reading recovery. It was going to cost an absolute fortune. Sir Jim Rose was asked to do a study and he decided that it was rubbish. It was the emperor's new clothes; there was nothing in reading recovery that was any different to what I was taught in 1970; it's just basic standard teaching. So, they saved all that money and then they were able to deal with the 2, 3, 4, 5 per cent of children who needed intensive care. You cannot do that in a system if there is 25 per cent of children failing, which is what's happening in Australia; it's just impossible. You cut corners, you make it too thin; there are not enough teachers in the world to make it happen. I just think we need to cut, like England did, reading recovery.

30 The other thing; we should look at the Clackmannanshire study in Scotland, where that was done really, really early in the piece and they got their illiteracy rates, after seven years, to about 5 per cent, and then the West Dunbartonshire study, which is based around Glasgow, very low socioeconomic area, got theirs to, statistically, zero. Why can't we do that here in Australia?

35 **MR COPPEL:** Maybe if you could forward those studies to us and provide the references, because I'm still trying to translate the message from your comments to the report that we have, which is looking at early-childhood education and care from the perspective of workforce participation and educational development. It doesn't look at the sort of didactic methods within the school.

One of the issues is the transition - - -

45 **MS ROE:** "Didactic"; what do you mean by that?

MR COPPEL: The teaching methods.

MS ROE: Yes.

5 **MR COPPEL:** One of the issues is the transition from preschool, before school starts, to school and the identification of children that may have learning difficulties. It's not talking about the methods which they're being taught but identification, for whatever reason it may be. I don't know if your work has any relevance to that or whether you have any comments that you would like to make in that context.

10 **MS ROE:** Yes, I would. It's very important that, if we - I've got an email here from George Etrelezis, who was the president of our Rotary Club:

Hi Rhonda

15 *As mentioned, my experience in and with small business as it relates to early childhood education.*

20 *There is something dreadfully wrong with an education system, where we have so many youngsters leaving our school system who cannot adequately spell, write and/or express themselves correctly.*

25 George ran the Small Business Commission for about 20 years, I think, and he has looked at this right across our country and he found out that there - he spoke to a Northern Territory colleague in the small-business policy sector:

30 *once alerted me of the fact that Aboriginal people acquire knowledge better by mixing the information to be taught with story-like images.*

35 That's basically what I'm saying to you, as a committee and an audience, that most of the problems that we have in early childhood are to do with the way we interact with the children. We should be singing, saying, dancing, playing, but we should also be doing story, really, really early, and connecting that to the curriculum. That's what Jolly Phonics does. Basically, it sorts out all the problems and I can't understand why people aren't using it, when it's been proven all over the world. Australia does not do it correctly.

40

Is that helping you?

45 **DR CRAIK:** Yes. That's good. Thank you. Thanks very much, Rhonda. Thanks for your presentation and thanks for all the information you have given us.

MS ROE: Thank you.

DR CRAIK: Just so everyone understands, normally, at the end of the hearings and all the people who've identified they wanted to present have presented and we've spoken to them, we ask if anybody from the audience wishes to make a brief statement. Child Australia have suggested they would like to make a brief statement. You were going to appear at the end but, since our next appearance isn't quite here because we're running early, if you're happy to appear, that's great. Could you start by telling us your name, your position and your organisation and then, if you'd like to make a brief opening statement, we'd be happy to hear from you? Thank you.

MS HINCHLEY: Thank you for slotting us in; it's most appreciated. My name is Sara Hinchley and I'm a senior program manager at Child Australia.

MS BLYTH: I'm Doreen Blyth and I'm the Lockridge early-learning and outside-of-school-hours care centre.

MS HINCHLEY: Just to give you some background on Child Australia, Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia, is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving developmental outcomes for children through education, early childhood services, family support and advocacy. Currently, Child Australia has two long day-cares, an outside-of-school-hours care and two budget-based funded services. We're spread throughout Western Australia and the Northern Territory, so we've got a long day-care located in Lockridge here in Perth, a long day-care - actually, two now, in Darwin and we've got one in Farrar and one in Nightcliff, and an outside-of-school-hours care in Lockridge, which is associated with our early learning centre, a mobile service that runs throughout the West Pilbara, and a budget-based funded out-of-school-hours care located on Bagot Community in Darwin.

All of our services have very strong relationships, that have developed over time and continue to develop, with our local primary schools; so, where we're collocated. The Lockridge centre in WA is an integrated centre, using a multidisciplinary approach towards care and education planning and support from family-support teams, including a child-health nurse located onsite at our service, who is embedded through our curriculum, our philosophies, everything that we do out at Lockridge, as well as external speech, psychological support and developmental support, such as occupational therapy.

That just gives you a bit of a snapshot around our Lockridge campus, in particular.

There were some key draft recommendations that we have an opinion on to share today, some of which will be also formalised in our formal submission.

5 Draft Recommendation 12.2-12.4, which relates to creating a single child-based subsidy; Child Australia supports in principle the simplification of a child-based subsidy, as described in the draft recommendation. We are concerned, however, that caution is taken to ensure that the linkage of the JET payment into this bundled payment does not create a payment that is only available to parents who are working, studying or looking for work.

10 Part of the integrated-service delivery approach out at Lockridge is that we manage a program which supports a number of families who, due to illness, family crisis, or factors beyond their control, are unable to work or study in any particular time. These families and their children need access to quality education and care and the access to fee subsidies plays an integral role in them accessing these supports, and also the long-term support of these families. It allows them to develop strategies and to seek external supports that will enable, as I said earlier, long-term, better outcomes within their family home. So for them, access to fee subsidies is critical and could actually present as a barrier if there was no consideration provided to fee subsidies for those families.

20 Recommendation 12.1, which is around funding options for ECEC, around diverting funding for the proposed paid leave scheme. Child Australia is advocating that the period of time parents have with their young children in their first years is supported and it's recognised for its important to parent and child attachment. A funding to provide appropriate and flexible support during these earliest years will return benefits to the parents and children and better support families. Whether they are returning to work immediately or seeking support for their children with additional needs.

30 Draft recommendation 8.3 and 8.4, Child Australia supports both of these recommendations. They both offer services and parents the opportunity to develop more flexible services that better meet their family's needs.

35 In relation to the approval of nannies, draft recommendation 8.5, the term "nanny" does not yet have an agreed meaning in the Australian community. Community feedback does indicate that there is work to be done to codify an agreed set of skills and an agreed description of this role. Child Australia also notes that the manner of regulation of nannies is also yet to be described. Child Australia sees the role of the regulator as critical in the development of a model that adequately provides protection for children alone at home with the nanny, reassurance for families and one that does not create a market imbalance between the regulation of nannies and the regulation of approved services.

45 Access for children in relation to additional needs to ECEC services - so draft recommendation 12.6, the special early care and learning subsidy. Child Australia supports any initiative which adequately supports the access

of children with additional needs to early childhood education and care services. All parents want the best for their child and children. The extra costs faced by parents of children with additional needs make affordable and accessible all the more important, but this need is impacted by the ability of services to offer the places.

Child Australia, as do many service providers here in the room and across the state and country, provides access to children with additional needs. However, it is routinely asked to cover a significant portion of the costs for employing the additional staff and in addition, in relation to additional staff, additional resources to adequately support the successful inclusion of these children.

A number of parents have reported to us, from a service provider's perspective, that their previous attempts to enrol their children at other services has been unsuccessful or unable to be maintained by other services because of these costs. So, we have had examples where we have had families that have had access barriers. They haven't been able to enrol their children, even though the service that they're wanting to enrol their children in may have vacancies. We have also had examples of families that have come to us after accessing a service who have then – enrolment has been ceased because of what they've been told as to be cost implications and they can't afford to keep their child any longer.

The disadvantaged communities program. This proposal, we believe, has merit and we look forward to receiving further detail on how this can actually be provided as offering support.

The inclusion support program. We, again, look forward to receiving further detail before making a comment in relation to that recommendation. But what is of concern to us is the once off payments in the draft report. Children's additional needs often become apparent as the child develops over time. This development often brings new challenges and new costs and any funding system must include the flexibility to recognise and support the child as they grow and develop, particularly where that development throws up new challenges. So, we're strongly advocating for some flexibility around that.

Child Australia understands the concept of services that are framed through the lens of a seamless childhood. This service means that a parent whose child grows and moves from an early childhood education and care service, then on to an outside school hours care service, does not face further barriers and should not face further barriers during that transition, and that these children are adequately funded in the outside school hours care sector as well.

Access of children around “at risk”, so - draft recommendation 12.7 and 12.8. The ongoing support for children accessing early childhood education care services is critical to their needs being met and families being supported. Our concern with these two recommendations is the concern around the deemed cost of services in the funding model. And it should be more accurately reflective of the actual costs of a service, from a service perspective. It is very important to note that services provide support to multiples of children and an inadequate deemed cost formula for 10 children, for an example, provides an accumulated burden for the service. As a response to that one, in particular, we would be happy to provide and will provide information in our formal submission in relation to real world costs of providing services to children deemed at risk, or with a disability, in our formal submission, to do some actual costs on what that actually does cost from a service provider’s perspective.

The integrated ECEC recommendation - which is 13.1. Well I gave you a quick snippet, which was very quick, around our Lockridge Camp. This is to provide integrated services and strongly supports the greater use of these in disadvantaged, metropolitan and rural and remote communities. Again, there’s an additional work that we’re scoping out at the moment which we will include in our formal submission around some actual real costs on integrated service delivery, which is holistic support to children and families.

DR CRAIK: Thanks very much. Just a couple of things. Your comment about the once-off payments, for inclusion support payments being once off. It’s not once only. It is individual grants.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes, you explained that one earlier today.

DR CRAIK: Yes, sorry.

MS HINCHLEY: So, the interpretation of the report?

DR CRAIK: Yes, I know. Obviously, we will need to rewrite that. And then in terms of the deemed costs, yes, if you can provide us information, that would be really helpful. We see the deemed cost as being a reasonable cost.

MS HINCHLEY: So do we.

DR CRAIK: The idea of the deemed cost was so that it didn’t include premium products like iPads

MS HINCHLEY: No, no, actual real costs.

DR CRAIK: Yes.

MS BLYTH: For the fundamentals.

5 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, plus a bit of profit for the provider. And then the deemed cost for children with additional needs, is for kids with a disability, working out the deemed costs. It's a bit like the MDOs, I guess, trying to work out what those things are.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

10 **DR CRAIK:** So, any information you can provide there would be extremely helpful to us on that.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

15 **DR CRAIK:** I guess one of your earlier comments was about the fact that we've got an activity test for parents whose children would be eligible for the basic "per child" subsidy, and your concern about the children that that would end up excluding them from child care. I guess the question is, are there any criteria to identify who of those children don't meet the activity
20 test, who should be able to get the subsidy for child care. Because I guess the concern is if you have a family where one partner is very well paid and the other partner is not working and you say, "Well, everybody can access a certain amount of care. Is it fair?"

25 **MS HINCHLEY:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: But they would also get subsidised care, compared with a really disadvantaged child from a family that really, really would benefit from it. So if there's any criteria that you can think of there that might help
30 do it.

And then the second question would be if subsidised care is available for those who don't meet the activity test, how many hours should that be. It seems perhaps a hundred hours that's available for those who do meet the
35 activity test might not be reasonable, but you get the idea.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes, we do and we'll put some recommendations in our formal report. Just to give you a quick example, we have sourced some funding now. We're going into our third year through a community partner
40 agreement out at Lockridge which actually supports families that are not under the watchful eye of Department of Child Protection, but have been externally referred to access the service.

45 That can be referred through Child Health, or that could be referred through – the parent might be suffering and working towards improving their mental illness. They could be actually suffering from a medical condition. They could be socially isolated within the community, so no family supports

to draw on. So, we have secured some funding now for the past three years. And it's minimal funding but it certainly does – we make it stretch a very long way.

5 The fact is that we remove the financial barrier cost for those families, which when you have a conversation with a family and they come in and they open up around, you know, what their needs are, they always, always want what's best for their child. You know that they're not going to access it because it could be a matter of paying their child care costs, or a matter of
10 buying fresh milk and bread. That's the reality of the world, particularly when you work within a low SES area.

 We enter into – we would like to say that they're a formal agreement with these families. We have some very open and honest conversation with
15 them. It's not shared throughout the whole service. There's no need for it to be shared. But we do enter into a supportive agreement where we can remove the cost, so remove that barrier of cost to accessing the service for two days a week generally.

20 Sometimes, depending on circumstance, we can increase it. And part of that formal arrangement with that parent is that in turn we support that parent then to access, you know, parent support programs that are offered by other providers, the opportunity to go and engage in – go and have an appointment with one of their practitioners they're seeing around their mental
25 conditions, or if it's health, without trying to drag two or three, particularly under four-year old children along because they don't have anywhere else to leave them. So, it's an enabler. We see it as an enabler to actually long-term support the development and build the parent's capacity to become a better parent, become a more competent parent, and also develop a stronger
30 attachment with their own children.

 Now, those agreements have timeframes on them. We don't enrol them straight off the back and go, "We're now going to have you here, and your child too, for the next two years and we're going to fund this". It's
35 monitored. There's conversation. We touch point with these parents and say, "How are you going with that? Do you need some support around that?"

 Our concern is that if it was always linked to a department or a state government, and everyone in this room would experience this, that there are
40 those families that just need that little bit of health, one month, two months, three months, whatever it might be, to get themselves on track, to get themselves back on track, to take some of the worry of them. But at the same time, the children are accessing quality education and care, which in the long term is going to help them be better long-term learners for their lifelong
45 learning.

Part of that work that we do as well, is particularly around the around the age of the children, is we start to engage them with their local schools, because we have also found that doing some scoping within the community that we work in, is that it has been documented that some times and the majority of the time, those families that sort of fit within that framework as such, slip through cracks, don't get to school when they should be at school within the age, and no-one seems to know. They might get to Lockridge Primary and they could be two years behind the eight-ball because they've just slipped through the cracks, because they're not under any registered authority or department. But they just need that helping hand.

For us, we have had successes where we have had families that have been on the program for a month and have actually re-entered the workforce. So, then they take up the responsibility of continuing to pay their child care fee. Our concern would be that there needs to be flexibility and that just because they're vulnerable or the children may be deemed at risk, it doesn't necessarily mean that a state department needs to become involved. There's ways that we can work with these parents and the early childhood sector is very good at doing that to support these families, to set them up.

DR CRAIK: Okay, thanks.

MR COPPEL: You mentioned support to the recommendation on 12.6, which relates to special disadvantaged kids and disadvantaged communities.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

MR COPPEL: And part of that is an idea of, where possible, transitioning – where funding arrangements are budget based. I think you have a number of centres which are budget-based funded.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

MR COPPEL: Where possible, transitioning to the child base funding arrangements. I am wondering if you have any sense or which areas that sort of transition would be – where that transition of that sort would be possible and if there are other areas where it's just not going to work.

MS HINCHLEY: I don't think it would work for the mobile budget-base funded. They travel out and service communities that are socially isolated, disadvantaged, and that wouldn't necessarily have access to education and care programs, and opportunities pre any formal years of schooling.

For instance, our West Pilbara mobile travels out to four different indigenous communities out from West Pilbara that operate affiliated with schools, yes. So, there's some connection there around community

engagement and making sure that these families feel welcome and, you know, comfortable within their school setting.

5 But it's also around adapting through the play experiences, what works for them and what's reflective of their culture and their needs. Embedding a mainstream program, even the one that we do at Lockridge, out to a community like Warralong in West Pilbara, would not work, it's just totally inappropriate. You need to work with the communities in which you're working in.

10

For the mobile service that we run, my recommendation in no way would be moving that towards a mainstream. However, in saying that, we do use the Early Years Learning Framework to influence our planning around the delivery of that program. So, it's not – there is a planned approach to what we're doing and we are looking at improving children's developmental outcomes, but at the same time, it's not mainstream.

15

There's no fee cost. If there was a fee, that's a barrier to those families to start with. So, our fee policy for the West Pilbara is that there is no fee cost. So, for us, whereas our other budget-based funder which is located on an indigenous site up in Darwin, you know, there's a possibility there that that could be a mixture of a funding source, because those children are based on community. They're the older age range. It's more of a five to 12 years. It's more formalised in the sense that we've looked at ways of, you know, signing in, signing out, just some of those formal practices that happen within a mainstream service.

20

25

I think there's movement there from our perspective around our own budget-based funded, but I definitely wouldn't see that the answer is to shift them all to mainstream, because that would be probably the end of some of them. It just wouldn't work. And it definitely wouldn't work for those communities that really do engage and engage well with those – particularly the mobile services.

30

DR CRAIK: When we talked about mainstream, we were really talking more about the funding. You know, having to bring them under the NQF. Do you still agree that if they're subsidised, they should all come under some version of the NQF?

35

MS HINCHLEY: For the budget-based?

40

DR CRAIK: Yes, for all services, which would include budget-based.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes, I do support that.

45

DR CRAIK: And I guess what our aim is in that transitional stuff is really to try to get the services to a "per child" base of funding, rather than that's what

the focus in terms of mainstreaming it, rather than say the program you would have in Perth or something.

5 **MS HINCHLEY:** Yes, right. Yes, I do think that the framework as they sit in the National Quality, there would need to be some flexibility in the compliance requirements, of course. But there's definitely some movement and definitely from our practice, ever since we've had the Early Years Learning Framework in, our West Pilbara mobile has, you know - those staff are working towards increasing their own qualifications base. They access professional development and support. They're currently developing a continuous improvement plan. So, yes, I would support that they come under that framework, but there needs to be some flexibility around the compliance in relation to the standards.

15 **MR COPPEL:** You mentioned that you operate what they call an integrated service.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

20 **MR COPPEL:** That's where kids are in an early learning environment but there's also a health worker that can identify potential health issues.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

25 **MR COPPEL:** And we have in the draft report and information request that tries to get sort of more information on what features are needed for an integrated service to work to meet those objectives most effectively.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes.

30 **MR COPPEL:** I don't know if you have any sort of views on your perspective or your experience on practices that work there, or that work particularly well.

35 **MS HINCHLEY:** Yes, and we will elaborate on those in our formal submission.

MR COPPEL: Okay.

40 **MS HINCHLEY:** But for us, particularly from Lockridge's perspective, the success has actually been to date, particularly working in the multi-disciplinary approaches with a diverse range of external professional workers, working with one child and one family, and that one family saying their story 12 different times over the period of a month. For us, we provide the base; we provide the support to the parent. We'll host the meeting. We
45 bring them in.

DR CRAIK: To the childcare service.

5 **MS HINCHLEY:** At our early learning centre, yes. So instead of - at enrolment, particularly if the family and child is externally referred to us, so if we have a referral from Child Health and - first of all the phone call would go through to Doreen and there would be some preliminary discussions to start with around, not breaching any confidentiality but some sharing around what is useful to know about this family, and generally whoever they've referred to would accompany that family to come to the service as well.

10
15 So straight away we have an open engagement with the family and say "We're not going to work in isolation here, we're not going to just worry about what's happening with you and your child at the time that you're with us. We want to look at a holistic approach to supporting what's best for the child, children in some cases, and for the family as a whole".

20 So we start scoping out in partnership with the family, never in isolation from the family, who are they already engaged with, who they are on a wait list for. Who is the possible primary school, if they've given any thought to that, that their children may be enrolling into if they're around that age, even if they're younger? And we will actually initiate the contact with who actually needs to be sitting around the table with this family, not away from this family, and start developing some multidisciplinary approaches around that.

25
30 For us, for some of the families I reflect on now, for them, it's had the stability of the Lockridge Camp to say, "Doreen, you get that going, can you bring them in, I'm comfortable here, I feel open, you'll support me to have those conversations". So for some of our families we've had some successes where we've got a very strong working relationship with Lockridge. So our kindy children who will transition to Lockridge Pre-Primary next year, we will have a seamless attachment process that will come into play from October on this year.

35 So it's not about giving them a piece of paper to say what that child can and can't do. It's around this is their child, this is their family, but best of all, they already know that because they're already sitting around the table having those conversations. So for us - and you know, that comes at a cost. We have a child health nurse on site. She is critical to the role that we play in
40 everything we do out there. She is not seen to be the child health nurse on site when she's there; she's one of the team. So you know, it can work but it's costly.

45 **MR COPPEL:** If your submission could also share ideas on how those innovative services could be funded, ECEC budget or - - -

MS HINCHLEY: Part of having the - that we have children right through to

the age of 12, 13. So for us it's around not only seamless from us to other support agencies or schools, but seamless from when they're in infancy right through to the age of 12, and supporting them to their transition to high school.

5

DR CRAIK: It would be interesting if you could give us in your submission some idea of what the additional costs of actually all that coordination is.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes, we have that available.

10

DR CRAIK: Because clearly that's going to add a cost to the childcare service and maternal health and the whatever and the whatever. I guess if you could us some thoughts about - one of the things we grapple with on that one is who pays the capital cost of all that, where does it come from and how does it initiate, how do those integrated services initiate.

15

MS HINCHLEY: Yes, it's interesting because of one of the interesting issues that we've come across is that having an array of different providers sitting around a table actually brings to the forefront how many of them have been funded to do the same thing. So that's actually highlighted - - -

20

DR CRAIK: An indictment, isn't it.

MS HINCHLEY: So that's been very interesting.

25

DR CRAIK: So you've got more money than you know what to do with.

MS HINCHLEY: No, the complete opposite. The complete opposite.

30

MS BLYTH: They have the money. We know what to do.

MS HINCHLEY: Yes, yes.

DR CRAIK: Thank you very much. Thanks for coming along. We look forward to getting your submission. Thank you.

35

Now do we have the Association of Independent Schools of WA? If you could, when you're comfortable, say your name and position and your organisation, and if you'd like to make a brief opening statement. Thank you.

40

MS GOULD: I'm Valerie Gould. I'm the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of WA, and with me is - - -

MS GORMAN: Wendy Gorman, the coordinator of early childhood programs at AISWA.

45

DR CRAIK: If you would like to make a brief opening statement.

MS GOULD: Certainly. I thought a bit of context of the independent schools in WA would be useful. We've got 146 independent schools. These range from - we've got 13 remote Aboriginal schools, Montessori schools, Steiner schools, quite a few quite low SES schools, and then of course we do have a few of the larger schools, some of them in the fairly high SES areas, and we obviously represent all of those.

We are actually only talking here about Recommendation 12.9 which is the continuation of universal access. Certainly our schools have found the extended hours for kindergartens at schools here in WA very, very important, and a number of our schools would not be able to continue with that extra hours of kindergarten without the additional funding. WA does have 11 hours of kindergarten anyway partly funded by the State Government, and of course the extent of that funding from both State and through universal access varies a lot according to the SES of the schools. So large high fee schools get a limited amount of funding. Remote Aboriginal schools get significant amounts because they have no capacity whatsoever to raise fees. So I might just hand to Wendy to give some more detail on that.

MS GORMAN: So as Valerie said, we support the recommendation 12.9 and we want to stress its importance to our organisation and also to West Australian children. For all schools, one of the great strengths of the universal access implementation in WA has been the cross-sectional approach, that every sector, the Catholic sector, the independent sector, the government sector, have all worked together to make sure that we have been offering 15 hours and that the funding has flowed through to the child regardless of the sector.

In the independent sector, the non-Catholic schools, we have three sources of funding. The major source of funding is the State Government which already supports the 11 hours of funding, and that's been a long-term position of Western Australia. We do have kindergarten as part of our schooling system. The universal access grant has enabled the extra four hours of schooling, extra four hours of kindergarten, and if that ceased then schools would be faced with two options. One in the independent sector would be to put up their fees if the parents have capacity to pay, or more likely the reality will be that some schools will reduce their hours back to 11 hours, and we see that as a backwards step, a detrimental step to the children.

When we went to 15 hours of kindergarten, from 11 hours to 15, it was not an easy process because of the issues around staffing and classrooms, and trying to fit two groups of 15 hours into a schooling week. A schooling week, I think it's about 26 hours of a week so just how do you manage that, has been quite challenging. With two groups of children coming in, there is no time in between for that to change over. The schools have been quite innovative in that process.

5 We think it would be a loss of faith in the government if the expectation is not honoured. Schools already are taking enrolments for the next two or three years with that expectation that kindergarten will be 15 hours, two day, three day cycle is quite a common one, or a two and a half day cycle, and parents will be planning their employment and things around that expectation would continue.

10 I am concerned that if universal access is not continued, funded, that there will be sort of a two-tier approach to preschool education, that the high fee schools will continue to offer 15 hours. In our low fee schools, parents have no more capacity to pay so they will go back to 11 hours, and it has already been stated that government schools will actually cut back to 11 hours. The children that most need those extra hours of preschool education will be the children who are probably the least able to access it. Schools have valued the extra four hours, the extra half day of contact with children.

20 In Western Australia parents see kindergarten as the entry point into schooling. They choose their school at that point at four years old. They choose a school based on the values of the school, the values match continuity of the values of home or based on faith, values of faith or philosophical or personal values, such as creativity, and that is the entry point into school. You do not usually go into one kindergarten in one locality and then move, two years later, when children start in Year 1.

25 I think they're our main points.

30 **MS GOULD:** I might just give one example of a school. Schools in WA have categories and the independent sector has categories. Category F is quite a low category. Emmanuel Christian Community School in Girrawheen, quite a low SES area, get, currently, from the state government, just over \$3000 a year funding for kindergarten students. Through universal access funding, they get nearly \$900 a year for the extra four hours. Their total fees for the year are \$1000. If they lost the universal access funding - if they wanted to keep the 15 hours - and they have many students, they have about 45 different cultures here, a lot of ESL students, language background other than English, they have many African students, a lot of Sudanese students, it's a real little United Nations, but, if they had to double their fees from \$1000 to nearly \$2000, they would in fact lose an awful lot of those students because their parents just don't have that capacity. Their parents quite like to send them there because they want the Christian values of the school but they couldn't spend \$2000 a year to get that. We would see that as a real disadvantage to schools like that.

45 As Wendy said, yes, the higher-fee schools, the Wesley Colleges and so forth, they could increase their fees and they'll maintain it but it's the little kids at places like Emmanuel Christian that really need the additional

5 support. Of course, if we extended that to our remote Aboriginal schools,
they have no capacity for any fees whatsoever, and they get nearly \$2000
extra to cover the extra four hours, and it's been seen critical to change any
outcomes for those young children because, obviously, in those communities,
very few of those children get much education at the home; it really starts
once they get into the schooling situation.

10 So, it's really just to say, yes, we support your recommendation 12.9
and we'd really like to see it go ahead, and I know that's got the support of
our minister.

DR CRAIK: It's a different reaction everywhere we go.

15 **MS GORMAN:** Is that on the same issue?

DR CRAIK: Yes.

20 **MS GOULD:** I'm sure it is, yes. We appreciate the opportunity to actually
state our case, as well.

25 **MR COPPEL:** You made the comment that, if it went from 15 hours to
11 hours, it'd be a retrograde step, but this 15 hours sort of comes out of the
existing arrangement and, I'm wondering, what is the basis for why 15 hours
is necessarily better? Is it more is better? Is it an appropriate amount?

30 **MS GORMAN:** I notice in your report that you find no evidence for the
15 hours. It's more that the establishment of the 15 hours has happened now
and schools have set in the infrastructure, employed staff, parents have an
expectation that their work patterns are around that 15 hours. We actually,
probably, would like more funding for more hours; that would suit parents'
work patterns a lot better. So, less is better.

35 One of the things that has happened in Western Australia is that the
11 hours used to be over four half-days, so children would get four days of
kindergarten. Because it doesn't match parents' work patterns, they don't get
four days now; they get two whole days. They're getting the same amount
but trying to build up attendance and patterns and continuity, particularly in
schools where attendance is an issue - it's a long time to count five more days
before you come back to kindy, so we actually think the more you're at
40 kindy, working with your teacher on a high-quality program, the better.

DR CRAIK: Our understanding is that more shorter is better than fewer
longer, from the research.

45 **MS GORMAN:** Yes. My personal opinion probably would be that it
doesn't fit what parents - that's a challenge, then, because, if you've only got
three years in the morning, where do you go after that?

DR CRAIK: Yes. Kindergarten or preschool hours aren't very workplace-friendly.

5 **MS GOULD:** They're not as family-friendly as they could be but we would
never say we just want the extra few hours just to suit parents' work patterns,
because we do believe that the quality of what's happening in the classroom
or in the kindergartens is very, very high and, certainly, the amount of work
10 that's been happening through the universal access national partnership has
been significant in terms of improving the quality of that education through
the Early Years Learning Framework and all the work that's happened
around then. I think there's probably no question that 15 hours is very, very
good-quality training for those students. We all know how important early
15 childhood education is to ongoing education outcomes as they move through
school.

MR COPPEL: Has there been any work that's looked at the impact of the transition from 11 hours to 15 hours?

20 **MS GORMAN:** Not in our sector but Rosemary might know more. That's
sort of something we'd look at cross-sectionally as a steering group rather
than just - we're quite a small sector, we just have 10 per cent of the - - -

25 **DR CRAIK:** Presumably, someone's looking at it to justify the additional
expenditure.

MS GOULD: Yes.

30 **MR COPPEL:** Yes.

MS GORMAN: Anecdotally, we do hear that students are coming into
pre-primary better prepared, having got more used to coming to the
institution, wherever it is, but, yes, we'd have to do more research.

35 **MS GOULD:** I think, talking about costs, schools have absorbed a lot of the
costs. The major cost is staffing. The buildings were already there and, in
some cases, were empty. We're maximising our buildings as far as we can
now. The staffing cost is the major cost, so, I think, needs better value.

40 **DR CRAIK:** Are you saying the fees for one of your schools is about \$1000
for a child to do 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year?

MS GOULD: Yes. That's what we call a low-fee school.

45 **MS GORMAN:** It's a very low-fee school.

DR CRAIK: What would be a higher-fee - - -

MS GOULD: The higher fee, in one of the highest SESs, for kindergarten, for 15 hours, is probably 7000/8000, but they get very low government funding and, of course, their facilities tend to be of a higher standard.

5

DR CRAIK: I guess one of the things we were thinking about in our recommendation was the money averages out at about \$1500 a child.

MS GOULD: Yes. We'd probably agree with that.

10

DR CRAIK: I guess the implication was that each child would get \$1500 of Commonwealth funding whether they were in - because, in the eastern states, a lot of them get preschool and long day-care centres, so our recommendation was that each of those children in a long day-care centre, for universal access, would get - - -

15

MS GOULD: Almost like a voucher system that would just follow the child wherever they were?

20

DR CRAIK: Yes, that's right. The \$1500 would be funded, but it would be \$1500 per ahead, as it was.

MS GORMAN: The community expectation in WA is that most children will go to kindergarten at four. I think we have a 98 per cent participation rate in Western Australia. Very few children do kindergarten in a long day-care.

25

DR CRAIK: Yes. It's very different

30

MS GOULD: Yes, because they are not funded.

DR CRAIK: It's a completely different system it seems between the three eastern states and then the rest of them, yes, but, I guess, from your description, it sounds like the state government gets the money from the Commonwealth and divides it up according to how it sees the costs - - -

35

MS GOULD: And that follows the child, yes, which is a great thing.

DR CRAIK: But it's not the same amount per child of Commonwealth money (indistinct).

40

MS GOULD: No. We made a decision based on the - the state-funding categories - was based on our state-funding categories for kindergarten, so we used that same rationale, same formula, and then funded each child, based on that. No child in the independent sector is fully-funded anyway; the state doesn't pay - the state pays an average of 75 per cent but some schools would only, maybe, get to 20 per cent and some might get higher.

45

DR CRAIK: You did say that, in some indigenous communities, I think it was you saying it, you couldn't charge.

5 **MS GOULD:** In WA, within the three sectors, we have what are called
sole-provider schools, we have government - in a community, the school, the
only school, may be a Catholic school, may be a government school, may be
an independent school, is the school that children go to. In our case, the
10 independent school is run by the community board members but parents have
no capacity to pay for that, so they receive a higher level of funding through
their state grant and they also receive some funding through the
Supplementary Recurrent Assistance program for preschool, as well, but the
costs are great out there and class sizes are quite small because of the number
of children in the community.

15 **DR CRAIK:** I guess one of the things that we were trying to embed in our
report was that, even where there's block funding for these services in an
area, that there'd be some attempt to try to encourage parents to pay at least
something towards the cost of having their children in there.

20 **MS GOULD:** I think, in the indigenous community, it's quite difficult
because these are quite remote communities, many hundreds of kilometres
away from anywhere, so there is very little capacity for work in those
communities. Some of them have jobs programs, they're part of a jobs
25 program, and they may work around the school, doing cleaning, as
educational assistants and so forth, but the rate of pay there is very, very low
and the cost of living, in terms of resources, food and so forth, is absolutely
astronomical there because of the transport costs.

30 So, most of whatever money they earn goes towards keeping a body alive,
more or less, and keeping their houses going and very little is left over for
anything. A couple of schools say, "Yeah, we try and charge \$30 an hour, to
get a bit of an idea of paying for it," but it contributes very little to the overall
cost.

35 **DR CRAIK:** It's more the idea of paying (indistinct) - - -

MS GOULD: It's more that, sort of, concept of paying; that not everything
comes for free. We do have one school that I know charges \$30 a year per
40 child, each year, but it's a very small amount because they just don't have the
capacity to pay anymore. They certainly don't want to say to these children,
"Don't come," because it's very important to get them used to coming to
school at a very, very early age, so they just have to work through that one.

45 **MS GORMAN:** It is the sole-provider school, the only school in their
community. There's not another school for another 200 kilometres. That
child has a right to education, or to preschool education or whatever. Thank

you.

DR CRAIK: That's been really interesting. Thank you. I hope you're going to put in a submission.

5

MS GORMAN: Yes. We will be.

MS GOULD: We are, yes.

10

DR CRAIK: Thank you. We'll appreciate that.

Last for this morning, we have Goodstart Early Learning WA. If you could state your name, positions and where you're from and then, if you'd like to make a brief opening statement, we'd be happy to hear from you. Thank you.

15

MS ANDREWS: My name is Nicky. I'm a centre director at Goodstart - - -

DR CRAIK: Can you give us your full name, sorry, for the record?

20

MS ANDREWS: Nicole Andrews. I'm a centre director in Goodstart Sinagra, in the northern suburbs. We cater for children from six weeks to five years. There are roughly about 150-plus families and 200-plus children in the centre, so we're near on full capacity. I've been in the childcare sector for roughly 18 years. I've worked for Goodstart for the last four; previous to that, ABC for six.

25

DR CRAIK: Thanks.

30

MR DAWSON: Todd Dawson, State Manager for Goodstart Early Learning. I oversee the provision of long day-care and some outside-of-school-hours care in some 53 locations across WA; that includes some regional locations, eight - eight of the 53. We provide services to 7000 children, 6000 families, and have a workforce of around 1000 educators. We're part of a national not-for-profit group at Goodstart, being 644 centres and the largest provider nationally.

35

MS OWENS: My name is Margaret Owens. I'm an area manager for Goodstart Early Learning. I've been with Goodstart for the last 18 months and, prior to that, I worked with Ngala, early parenting, early childhood services, for 18 years. I'm responsible for eight early learning centres with Goodstart, in the metropolitan area. They cater for 568 children daily, or 2840 children per week.

40

DR CRAIK: Do you want to make a brief opening statement?

45

MR DAWSON: Yes. Thank you. First of all, we're thankful for the

5 opportunity - for you coming to Western Australia and providing this forum
for the people in this sector to have their voices heard. We'd like to speak
particularly about three areas in the draft report: the birth to three years, and
the importance of learning and development in the first three years, and the
10 benefits of having a skilled and experience workforce, particularly providing
services to young children; the assessment and ratings process in the Early
Years Learning Framework. Nicky will share her experiences, having gone
through that, and the benefits for children and educators of the assessment
and rating process, and I'll speak a little to ratios and qualifications, where
15 Western Australia has been a leader, we believe, in the early years and
support the long-standing quality measures for qualifications and ratios.

15 **DR CRAIK:** We're happy to hear from the three of you but, the longer you
speak, the less time we'll have for questions.

MR DAWSON: Sure. No worries.

DR CRAIK: Over to you.

20 **MS OWENS:** I'll just give a little bit of a background. Prior to
commencing with Goodstart and my role at Ngala, I was responsible for early
childhood and development services there, as well as the community
programs, and established the indigenous children and parenting program and
also the parenting advice and support program in at the women's maximum
25 security here in Perth. During my time and employment at Ngala, I also
responded to a range of consultation papers during the development and
establishment phase of the Early Years Learning Framework. One of Ngala's
centres was also one of the 29 pilot sites for the Early Years Learning
30 Framework and, additionally, I have written and published articles in a range
of early childhood journals around the quality of early childhood profession.

I come with a background of more than 25 years' experience. I have a
diploma, bachelor, post grad in leadership and I also had the privilege of
doing some overseas research in early childhood, education and care services
35 through a church or fellowship, where I looked at centres of excellence in
Vancouver, LA, Michigan, Chicago, Denmark, Sweden and the UK.

40 During my professional career, I've also been involved in a range of
committees; for example, Early Childhood Australia for 20 years;
WACOSS's children's policy committee; and the Early Years Learning
Framework.

45 At Goodstart I provide hands-on professional support to educators and
centre directors, I build relationships with families and children.

What I'm going to talk with you about today is in response to the
Commissioner's recommendation in the draft report that the requirements for

educator centre-based services should amend that all educators working with children, birth to 36 months only, require to hold at least a Certificate III or equivalent, and the number of children in which early childhood teachers must be employed is assessed on the basis of the number of children in a service aged over 36 months.

I wanted to come today to talk about why, from an operational perspective, it's important to have skilled and qualified educators in early learning centres, from birth to three, and why we should maintain the current requirements. I won't be going into the detail of the neuroscience about the brain development but I will go into detail about how this translates into practice and why children, especially very young children, attending long day-care need diploma-qualified educators to support their learning and development and ensure a safe and secure environment.

About the science, as many people will have been told, birth to three matters; it matters as it's the most rapid period of brain development, it is the period where the brain is hardwired towards trusting or distrusting the world in which they live, it's the period where young children in learning are developing an understanding of how to trust the world around them, develop secure and strong attachment with primary caregivers; and, learning how to trust, the name of the game for young children is to actually delight in me. By doing this, we support their brain to be hardwired to feel secure with their attachments and trust the world. It gives them the confidence to explore the world around them. They learn how to understand their feelings and emotions in a manner that is socially tolerable, respond to the ongoing demands of their experiences and develop the capacity to think and feel with experiences of another. What does that mean in practice? I'm going to give you some specific examples now.

In terms of safety and development, I've seen firsthand that, in order to deliver quality early learning, you need to have skilled, qualified educators. A diploma-qualified educator has the skills and experience to ensure safety in the development and the relationships with families. Diploma-qualified educators have the skills to plan early learning environments that take into account how the environment supports supervision of children, how to reduce injury, with setting-up of equipment, equipment that is developmentally appropriate, taking into account choking hazards, the importance for babies and young children to be seated whilst eating to prevent choking. A Certificate III does not provide those skills.

In terms of learning and development, they have learnt the skills to be responsive to formal and informal learning. For example, a Certificate III educator can sing a nursery rhyme and cuddle a baby; a skilled diploma educator knows to give each child one-to-one attention, to engage in conversations that promote children's language skills, knowing that using the singsong voice with young babies helps them understand the meaning of

language through tone. They know how to plan and implement early learning experience; they have a skillset around development and can predict different stages of development; for example, separation anxiety.

5 Diploma educators will engage in work with parents, to ensure secure and trusting relationships that are supported from home and the early learning environment for children through this period. By doing this, it supports children to continue to explore the world around them, it teaches children about relationships and emotions, helps young children to organise their own
10 emotions in a safe and secure environment. This is the beginning of developing their social emotional skills. A diploma educator knows and skilfully provides early learning environments to meet these developmental needs.

15 The skill and ability of diploma educators to respond to and work with children's emerging development needs for language, social skills, emotional, numeracy, literacy lays the foundation for all future learning and places children in a strong position for entering into the school system.

20 ECT, early childhood teachers, provides an additional pedagogical depth to the educational play and learning experience for children. With some children spending many of their waking hours in childcare, it's critical that children can engage in curriculum that not only meets their needs but
25 also extends their learning and development, with a stimulating provocation and engaging curriculum. In doing this, children are well placed to take on new learning experiences in the kindy and beyond years at school.

30 A Certificate III-qualified assistant simply doesn't these skills to perform these tasks. The Certificate III is a basic minimum qualification.

35 In terms of relationships with families, diploma and early childhood educators have the skillset to support transitions, orientation, children's explorations and provocations at an early learning centre; they know their way around the Hoffman circle of security, its application in the early-years
40 setting, hold discussions with parents about what a secure base looks like and sounds like for children from home to care and care to home. Building these strong relationships with parents lends itself to supporting parents when a qualified educator needs to work with families and children to address developmental delays relating to language and engaging with speech therapists that support the children in their home and in the early learning environment.

45 The importance of diploma-qualified staff is recognised through the sector. In my previous role, we had a commitment to employing diploma or bachelor-qualified educators for all positions in an early learning and development centre. This was based on the importance of attachment and security in the birth to three years and for the three-plus years related to

supporting children's social emotional development and problem-solving conflict resolution, recognising the importance of having these skills to be able to successfully engage and participate in formal education provided through the school system.

5

Additionally, we also had the commitment to lower-than-state-regulated child-to-staff ratios - for example, we had one to three for the birth to one, as opposed to the regulations of one to four; and one to eight in the three-plus years, instead of the one to 10 - for the social emotional and those reasons that I've mentioned.

10

To summarise, having skilled qualified educators - that is, diploma educators and early childhood teachers - matters for young children as much as it matters for older children. Birth to three matters, as it is an investment in our social and economic outcomes for Australia for today, tomorrow and the future. It takes courage, foresight and commitment of our policies and economic stability to invest in the now for future outcomes. By acknowledging birth to three matters now, we should not go backwards.

15

20

MS ANDREWS: I wanted to come here today to offer my perspective as centre director, who has undergone the ratings and assessment process twice, once rated as working towards and the second time was rated as exceeding, and I've seen how it has benefited the service and quality of care and education we provide. I should note that the National Quality Standards suggest that all centres rated as working towards are supposed to be reassessed within a year but not many have been and, as regulators, are focusing on getting the first-round assessments completed first.

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30

Our centre at Sinagra volunteered to go through the initial first round of assessments and ratings in WA in 2012. We were rated at meeting on five quality areas and working towards on two quality areas. The report from the first round detailed the specific elements in the quality areas that we needed to improve on. The elements that we needed to improve on were areas we had identified on our centre's quality improvement plan. That needed improvement, so it was in fact a true reflection of how our centre was performing.

35

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Our quality improvement plan was developed as a collaborative effort, involving educators at the centre, supported by my area manager and early learning consultant. This was a great motivator for my team and inspired us to move forward. With having specific areas of improvement highlighted, we then actively used the report to specifically focus on these elements whilst maintaining the other areas.

45

In our second-round assessment, last October, we met all the quality areas and, as exceeding on five of them, received this as our overall rating. I understand that, across Goodstart of all the working-toward centres that have

been reassessed, all have improved their ratings across the quality areas.

5 If the processes of report were not as detailed, I feel it would have been open for interpretation by all involved, which may have altered the way we move forward in preparing for our next assessment. The overall process and time preparing for assessment are no different than when we had accreditation; in fact, as your quality improvement plan is an evolving document which you are continually updating, it becomes part of your practice.

10 The standards provide a clear guideline for all services and their educators and it sets a minimum standard. It provides consistency for quality care and education across the country. All seven quality areas are important for ensuring best practice and each of the 58 elements provide guidance to services to reach best practice.

15 The Productivity Commission's draft report has proposed amendments to quality area 3, specifically in relation to sustainability. I feel like this was an area that challenged us in our first round, as sustainability was a new focus for us in the childcare centre. With this being an error of focus for my service, educators and children embarked on a learning journey, exploring what being sustainable means and how we can care for our environment and community. Living in a country where some of our precious resources are limited, it is important that we are able to educate children at this early age.

20 Sustainability should not be looked at as a burden for the sector, rather, as us doing our part for the environment and ensuring these resources are there for many years to come.

25 Starting our sustainable journey included simple things, like turning off lights when the rooms were not in use, photocopying back and front, collecting water for our plants, setting the machine on economy wash, and having these basic conversations with the children to embed that practice. I don't feel that the standard was particularly difficult but did require a more thought-out approach in the practice.

30 **MR DAWSON:** Ratios and qualifications, as I said in the opening statement, Western Australia has been a leader in the early years in this area and we support the longstanding quality measures for qualifications and ratios. Since 1986, WA ECEC services have operated with what is now the current national standard of child ratios, being one to four for birth to

35 two-year-olds, one to five for two to three-year-olds, and one to 10 in the three-plus years. So, we certainly would not want to see any watering-down of those now-implemented national educator-to-child ratios, certainly given the fact that it's nearing 20 years that it's been the case for WA.

40
45 Qualifications matter; a particular point of focus here is that the first educator to be working in the birth-to-two-year-old room does need to be a

diploma-qualified person. That has again been the case for some time in Western Australian regulation.

5 The other point I just wanted to touch on is that Goodstart in Western Australia doesn't face any issue attracting passionate or skilled educators. The issue, more so, that we face is retaining the skilled and committed workforce, due to more pay-related issues and the comparativeness of that to even unskilled roles that can pay higher than what qualified early childhood roles can pay.

10 Evidence to support those statements. Out of our 53 centres, we've got early childhood teachers in 51 of the 53. The two remaining centres, one is a regional centre and one is a metropolitan centre. We've got two waivers in place as a result of that and we've got one other waiver in at the moment, just
15 on the regulation 126, which is the 50 per cent of staff holding a diploma qualification. And that's purely been borne from two recent resignations of diploma-qualified staff.

20 So as a large provider, we have been able to skill up and support our people and attract people to meet the requirements of the National Quality Standard, as Nicki as alluded to, through those centres that have been assessed and rated, the evidence is starting to build of the higher quality outcomes as a result of that.

25 Our current vacancies for positions at Goodstart, we've got 21 vacancies currently across our state network, the majority of them being assistant roles. And a bit to Margaret's point, what we're looking to do with the recruitment of those roles is actually, where possible, have diploma-qualified people but working in assistant roles. We find that that affords
30 greater flexibility across the day for ratio requirements, but also it underpins our position of that the higher qualifications do support improved outcomes for children.

35 Thank you.

DR CRAIK: Thanks very much. You made the comment and a lot of the discussion has been about qualifications and the value of the qualifications and what they do. You made the comment that evidence is starting to build of the outcomes. Do you have any quantifiable evidence from the Goodstart
40 operations of the actual benefits, research-based evidence that you would be in a position to share with us, of the evidence of outcomes.

45 We accept that that for children, we accept that the early years are very important for learning. We accept that the family is probably the most important predictor of the outcomes of child development. And that for disadvantaged children, that particularly for quality of care in an early childhood service is better than the quality at home, better off to have them in

some kind of early childhood service, and the outcomes down the track are better. There's no doubt about that for disadvantaged children or children with additional needs.

5 But to us, the evidence for children who don't have additional needs in those early years, and the outcomes down the track of being in child care, some kind of child care services are not nearly as compelling. And I think the COAG said the same thing when they signed off on the standards and that they cannot separate different structural features of quality and say, "Well,
10 this feature leads to this outcome", or in many cases, the actual level of qualification.

15 Any evidence, and I mean you're not the first people, of course, who have said to us that our comments on the Certificate III issue and the teacher issue are ill founded, but any evidence that you can show us, we would be very happy to take on board.

20 And Margaret, what you read out today, if you could send us in that as a submission, that would be great, because probably taking it all it while you were talking is probably a bit much, but that would be really good to get that. Any evidence that you've got would be very valuable to us.

MR DAWSON: I will absolutely take that on notice then.

25 **DR CRAIK:** That's the basis for our concern about this, that it's hard for us to see the outcomes.

MR DAWSON: Two things I can do is (1) feed that back to Julia, our CO.

30 **DR CRAIK:** I'm sure Julia is aware of it already, but feel free.

MR DAWSON: Yes, and for future public hearings that yes, she may well be able to share that more explicitly. But we will certainly reflect that in our final submission.

35 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, I think that's an important issue. I guess the other point is that if centres want to have higher education levels, we think that's fine. It means that the market can differentiate itself, you know, those who have higher qualified early child care educators are able to differentiate themselves
40 from other services. But is that a case that the government should subsidise those higher level qualifications, I guess, is the real issue. I mean if government subsidise it, usually they choose the minimum, and if others want to add to that, that's fine. But should the taxpayer pay is the question.

45 Jonathan?

MR COPPEL: I just wanted to come to the points that you made, Nicki, on the assessment.

MS ANDREWS: Yes.

5

MR COPPEL: Many of the people that we met, and the submissions from the perspective of the family, found it difficult to sort of navigate what had actually – the assessment ratings of a centre mean. Because you're in a situation where you had 58 quality elements and if you missed out on one of them, you would be sort of working towards, even though maybe you're achieving the other 57, to a very, very high standard, and that was sort of seen as confusing.

10

MS ANDREWS: I suppose for me, the elements that we didn't reach meeting, were elements we knew that we weren't meeting and so, as I said, it was a true reflection. So, if you're doing all those things, I suppose that would be different. I suppose coming down on one would be a little I suppose frustrating but that's there to improve. That's what it's about, that continuous improvement. So you would know then to focus more on that one element that you're missing out on and go from there.

15

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MR COPPEL: It's not so much the message that comes out of it. It is how that message is interpreted, because you could still get a rating which identified areas of weakness. It's just then sort of the label that's attached to it is one that probably - - -

25

MS ANDREWS: Because you're rated "working towards", you mean?

MR COPPEL: Yes.

30

MS ANDREWS: Yes, and it is new. I mean it is because you've gone from accreditation where you were high quality and then it went down to "working towards". But it's a new journey that we're on with this ratings sort of assessment. We're wanting to provide that high quality education, so we're going to get there. It's going to be quite new, but with me going through it twice now, we have improved. So eventually I think if every – it's going to be that continual improvement with it, whilst maintaining.

35

MR DAWSON: I think if I can just add to what Nicki has said, I think by and large we have found, as Nicki's story attests, that the detail by which the assessment and rating process that we've undertaken to date, generally two-day visits, generally two assessment officers out, has led to a more thorough and robust assessment of where we're at, leading to then a well-informed report, if you authentically engage in it. And to Nicki's point, want to be better, it's a great road map to help you do that.

40

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We have had just about half of our national network assessed and rated now. There is about a third of our network where they have achieved their “working towards” result, have actually got that because of five or fewer elements not being met. I do think that if you miss by one element and then you’re labelled with a “working towards”, that there is an opportunity through this to have a look at that. Maybe there is some benchmarking that can occur so that, you know, 57 of 58, you might not necessarily, depending on what element it might be - I think there’s some elements in there as well that are very, very significant and to not meet on that should have significant ramifications for your overall rating.

DR CRAIK: It must be the only exam in the world where if you get 57 out of 58, you get “working towards”.

MR DAWSON: But it’s not a fail.

DR CRAIK: A lot of parents reacted and said they didn’t quite – no, they were unhappy with having their child in a centre which was labelled as “working towards”, even if it got 57 out of 58. It’s not four out of five stars.

MR DAWSON: Yes, there is a significant education piece there for families and the communities about the assessment - - -

DR CRAIK: Well, the easier way is to change the scoring system, I would have thought, the labelling for the scoring.

MR DAWSON: Yes. But I think, again to Nicki’s point, yes, it has a dual purpose. There is the outward facing that it’s posted on Mychild website. Families can see it, use it, and possibly can form decisions as to what provider or what-not they may choose.

From an intrinsic perspective, it’s been invaluable, to go from “work towards” to leap frog to exceed. As Nicki said, the number of services, particularly in WA, we’ve had assessed and rated from the first round to the second, all are showing improvements, be it stepping up on “work towards” to “meet”, or in Nicki’s case, “work towards” to “exceed”, or significant numbers of elements improving, if not the overall rating, which is our proxy of the higher quality outcomes being delivered.

MR COPPEL: In this area, we have also recommended that the “excellent” rating be removed and the highest rating would be “exceeding quality standards”. Do you have any views on this particular recommendation on the “excellent” rating?

MR DAWSON: Yes. Not at a local level. I think organisationally it is something that we are looking at to respond to in our final submission to you. But yes, certainly not in a local sense, no.

DR CRAIK: The question I have for you, Todd, is you said that you don't have any trouble attracting skilled staff but you have trouble retaining them. How does it work that you can get them in in the first place but then they go? What's the different thing about it? Is it because they then have experience and they can go somewhere else, or what is it?

MR DAWSON: The majority of our exiting staff, you know, we do want to know why they are leaving in order to inform better practices to retain our people. In the majority of cases, they are leaving for better paid jobs and in the majority of cases, outside of this particular profession and sector of work. One example I can share, more recently was a diploma-qualified educator down in one of our centres in the south west who took on a hundred thousand dollar a year cleaning job at the Boddington Gold Mine and just for lots of personal reasons for them. And that is, I won't say it, not uncommon but our data certainly shows that the reasons that people do leave is largely pay driven and leave the sector as a result of that.

DR CRAIK: Just one question for you, Margaret. The role of an early childhood teacher in under threes.

MS OWENS: Sorry, could you repeat that.

DR CRAIK: The role of an early childhood, like a university-qualified teacher in under threes?

MS OWENS: I think it's a valuable asset for under threes. If you look back at what the research is telling us and about the importance of development in the first three years of life, having a more skilful qualified educator that's working with those children can only be an asset to the children and to families and to the work in which they can contribute to supporting children in laying the foundations for ongoing learning and development, both formal and informal. I am a strong advocate of qualifications.

DR CRAIK: Okay. In the required ratios, if I recall correctly, the ratios for the early university-qualified teachers for under threes are like 20 per cent of their time for 25 children. So that's one day a week for 25 children and for 60 per cent of the time for I think it's 50 children or 40 children or something. My question really is, how much input can one person have in relation to the education?

MS OWENS: You're really only dipping their toe in it from my perspective, and I'm sure Goodstart would aspire to that as well. You need to have a skillset within an early learning environment that supports really rich and robust pedagogical practices and that comes from having diplomas to early childhood educators across the birth to three to six year age group. The richer and the diversity of the skillset is what actually lifts the quality across

the whole centre, not just for a specific age group. It's important for all children.

5 **MR DAWSON:** I'll just add one to that I guess. We see it as quite fortunate in one regard that the universal access funding, whilst it largely is channelled through state, independent, and Catholic school system, that that actually means that with the regulatory requirement to have early childhood teachers in our services, we're not necessarily bound to them working with children of a certain age. Unlike, for example, Queensland, where funding from 10 universal access may come to long day care providers and then there's the requirement for those early childhood teachers to be, to Margaret's point, working specifically with four and five-year old aged children.

15 So, we have got a very mixed and more so tailored approach to how our early childhood teachers are used across the WA services because of that. We have got ECTs in birth to two-year old rooms. And similarly, we've got some that are in running kindergarten programs with four and five-year olds. It's one of the nuances between states, but you know, one element that we actually see as being a benefit.

20 **MS OWENS:** I think the long term – I will just add to that, the long-term benefit is if you've got the ECT in the younger age group in the nursery rooms, then the practice of the children and the educators transitioning together to keep the attachment and security relationships going, the richness of learning and development follows the children all the way through as well. 25 It's very important.

DR CRAIK: Thanks very much and I look forward to your submission. Are you putting in one WA, or is it just Goodstart putting it in? 30

MR DAWSON: It will be a national Goodstart one but we will certainly have our input into it.

DR CRAIK: Okay. Well, Margaret, if we can get your words somehow. 35

MS OWENS: Yes, the national office has it.

DR CRAIK: We've got them through there, I suppose. It's just easier to read them. 40

MS OWENS: Yes. No, the national office has it but I certainly can, and you've actually got it as well.

MR DAWSON: Yes. 45

DR CRAIK: Thank you. That concludes today's scheduled proceedings but, for the record, is there anyone else who wants to appear today before the Commission.

5 **MS McSPORRAN:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: Would you like to come up. If you can give your name and where you're from and then if you would like to say something.

10 **MS McSPORRAN:** My name is Virginia McSporran and I am from Curtin
University Early Childhood Centre, but I do need to preface that with my
age. I have been in a lot of places up until now and so this is probably my
last position before I do retire. I have managed many children's services in a
15 very wide area of Western Australia. I worked with children of additional
needs. I am a school teacher originally, early childhood. So a lot of the
questions that you were asking today about children at risk and so forth, have
come in to my professional life and I would really like to comment on quite a
lot of those if I may.

20 **DR CRAIK:** Ten minutes.

MS McSPORRAN: The first one though is on qualifications and I really am
going to be supporting what Margaret said and it's not a new thought. I mean
people have been saying for a long time and research was available, and I
25 understood it was not just for people who had additional needs, that the
higher the ratio, it was better for children in long day care and the better
qualified it was. Many of us have been working towards that for years.

For instance, in Curtin University Early Childhood Centre, we have 98 per
30 cent of our staff who have diploma or early childhood degrees. We're
licensed for 133. We run at about 126 each day, purely because I think the
environment needs to be enlarged slightly to do the 133. And there is no
question that the level that we provide in terms of an education and care is far
better since we have been getting more and more qualified into the centre.

35
We also have a high ratio. We have an extra six or seven staff over and
above the basics that are required, because if you think about it, and I really
have to go back to the first speaker of the nanny, she made a good point. If
you're looking at the basic ratios of two people to eight children, it's pretty
40 busy and there's not a lot of quality. If you add just one extra person, you
find the quality increases incredibly.

And so it is really important that if this Productivity Commission report is
looking at a clever country, which is what I understood the Early Years
45 Learning Framework was looking at in terms of getting this report, not just
on the economy, but they want to see the next generation being able to work

and to work well, that we really do need to invest the money for children at a young age now. It's just not going to happen unless we do.

5 One of the things I think if you look at research that hasn't happened in
this country is because it's been a long time since we've had the ability to
know that when we advertise the staff we're going to get a lot of good staff
applying, as it was mentioned earlier. There have been some dreadful
courses. There have been times I have employed people and interviewed
10 people that have got a qualification that quite frankly they haven't said one
thing that's even suggested that they have any basic understanding of
children and care, and that's not just me being difficult. It really has been
dreadful.

15 The tick and flick I think really relates a little bit to the way training
changed almost 20 years ago when it was outcome based in terms of you just
had to have a quick answer. You didn't have to do assessments. You didn't
have to offer an understanding of theory or practice. It was just a yes or a no
answer or whatever and people could pass that but they didn't know what
they were doing when they got out.

20 I do think, although I know the government is looking at a lot of the
training programs, I think that really is going to be a basis for a lot of the
changes that we need to see.

25 I wanted to say that I am really pleased with a couple of things that I
read. Number one was in looking at the subsidy for the early care and
learning, that you were looking at doing a higher level for the under threes
and the other threes. That's been an issue for a long time, and one of the
issues that you have had to look at is the lack of places, and a lot of those
30 lack of places is for under threes, not over threes, because of the
kindergartens. That's because most centres only take four or eight under two.
So, you can see there's not a lot of turnover in two years.

35 Our centre takes over 44 and we still have two A4 files waiting lists. It
is an expensive service. The basics of one to four, we are offering three staff
with eight. And so we do need to look at that area, and so that extra subsidy
is going to make it easier for parents because people will be able to charge
what it is costing. You're right, the older age group is subsidising. I mean
that's true.

40 **DR CRAIK:** Just to interrupt you, do you think services will actually charge
costs effectively or do you think they will still smooth it all out?

45 **MS McSPORRAN:** I don't think we can any longer. I think we are all
getting to the stage that we have to really look at what we're charging and
what the real cost is. I don't mind saying that for years and years the threes
and fours have subsidised the younger age groups. When I am in a centre

that has so many younger ones, we can't do it anymore. We are actually going to start bringing back what used to happen many years ago, which was you did have a different fee for under three and a different fee for over three. We stopped that but we are going to bring that in anyhow. So, this really supports that should it occur.

In terms of the qualifications, I just want to talk about, you talked about the types of services relating to the outcomes for children. I do believe that learning – we all know learning does occur from birth. We have heard people say today it doesn't. It does, and it is the type of experiences and opportunities that children are given.

If you come from a family that you have a mother that spends almost every waking hour with you and is playing with you and can look at the way you're interested in things and extend you and maybe give you lots of provocations to look at it differently, even from a baby's perspective, then you're going to have 50 per cent of your learning is really occurring then. We know that we're born with 50 per cent of our parents in us. The rest is coming from our environment. So just having somebody who really cares and keeps me safe and cuddles me and loves me, isn't going to help my learning tremendously. It may help my confidence but it's not going to help those neurons grow and get thicker and thicker as Margaret alluded to in the brain research. I am amazed that NifTI haven't had a lot to say about this.

DR CRAIK: Who?

MS McSPORRAN: NifTI. They're the national organisation that have been working for a long time to improve the quality of care in Australia and the brain research has played a lot to do with it and many paediatricians have been involved in that. I'm just amazed.

DR CRAIK: I don't think we've - - -

MR COPPEL: I don't think so.

SPEAKER: It's actually morphed - I know you don't want me to say anything but it's actually morphed into Esri now.

DR CRAIK: Esri, okay.

MS McSPORRAN: Esri, okay. A lot of it started with NifTI and it's now moved to Esri.

The other thing I wanted to say just about that learning is, one of the things the early years learning framework has highlighted, and it has been from research, and research that has happened in long day care and the Forest Schools, in the Reggio areas and in New Zealand and that is that not only is

that provocation important but that we have a generation, if not two, of children that have been kept so safe that they're wrapped in cotton wool, that they can't assess risk.

5 I mean one of the drug issues that some of the younger people are facing today is because they haven't learnt that there are consequences for things they do, nor have they assessed that, you know, "If I take this drug today, have I got friends around who can rush to me to hospital. Is there a doctor? Is it worth the risk, or whether I just take it?"

10 I mean they're some of the basic things that are really hurting our society today because children have not been brought up being able to assess risk at a very young age. And that's something that a Cert III would not be able to do. It's been said, Cert IIIs are really very good support for qualified diploma or early childhood teachers.

15 Early childhood teachers have also been working with under threes for many years in other states. It's not new. It's expensive but it's not new and it is something that was always seen as very valuable, and I think it's something we should really continue with.

20 The last thing I wanted to talk about was you asked about the criteria for people who don't fit the employment status about going into child care. Well, any kind of children's service, for some years the government, and two previous governments, recognised that there are lots of families these days who are isolated; isolated because of not having extended families, isolated because of work, moving and so forth, and that most people don't know what it's like to be a parent until they are a parent. And so it's really a preventative measure.

30 Two days a week was what was offered so that people could get a break from their children and they could have an adult life, they could meet other children's parents, which is where a lot of those isolated people start to build up their friends again. I think it was a really good measure but, you know, it does need to be contained and not necessarily in the hundred hours.

35 **DR CRAIK:** Okay. That's a good thought. Thank you for that. Thank you very much.

40 Is there anyone else who would like to make a comment today? If not, thank you and I adjourn this proceedings to Monday in Port Macquarie.

Thank you.

45

**MATTER ADJOURNED AT 1.07 PM UNTIL
MONDAY, 11 AUGUST 2014**

