

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

Productivity Commission Report released 22-7-14

Keiraville Community Preschool response

There are many positive aspects of the Productivity Commission Report such as introducing a Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy for children with additional needs, Block funding for providers to deliver services in disadvantaged and Indigenous communities; and Diverting funding from the proposed Paid Parental Leave scheme to childcare.

However there are also many aspects that need to be rethought and re worked. If the recommendations of this report are implemented the impact on children could be very negative. The cost of care would increase and the options available to families may decrease.

1. Dedicated preschools should remain in scope

The Draft report recommends preschools not participating in the National Quality Standards and being regulated by the state education department. Children who attend state funded preschools and school based preschools have the same rights as all Australian children. Community owned preschools should remain in scope and accountable under the NQF. Community Owned preschools want to remain accountable under the NQF.

All Early Childhood Service Types should be accountable under the NQF

2. Youngest children should have qualified educators

The Commission recommendations removing access to early childhood teachers for children aged birth to 36 months is contrary to the research and denies the rights of our youngest citizens. At a time when brain development is at its peak children aged birth to 36 months should be cared for and educated by university trained teachers. 0- 3 year olds should have tertiary trained educators. Unquestionably research links qualification levels of educators with quality education.

3. Ratios of Educators and Qualifications

Two of the key components of quality, ratios of educators to children and the qualifications of educators should be a national requirement of the NQS. The commission recommends consistent qualification requirements across the states. Yes.

However the standard set should not erode the high standards already in place. It should bring states that are lagging behind up to a standard.

4. Not For Profit Services should retain Tax Concessions

The Commission is recommending the removal of fringe benefit tax concessions to not-for-profit ECEC services. Not for Profit Early Childhood Services should be supported by retaining their tax concessions. They are community owned and should not be subject to tax burdens.

5. **Removing registered CCB subsidies** – this is the only subsidy families using preschools can receive and it should not be removed.

6. **Community Preschools should retain their identity** and should remain managed by and responsive to their communities. Suggestions that the Australian Government should

negotiate with the state and territory governments to incorporate their funding for preschool into the funding for schools, and encourage extension of school services to include preschools should be rejected. Community owned preschools perform a much broader service as a community hub and should retain their identity.

7. **Salary Gap for Teachers**. The report does not address the pay inequity that exists between teachers who teach in a schools and teachers who teach in the early childhood settings. The salary gap is growing and the difference between teachers can be between 24% and 30%. This is unacceptable. The long term workforce issues are well known. Attraction and retention of the early childhood sector are reaching a critical point. We believe the Commission should recommend intervention by the Government into the workforce issue and address pay disparity between teachers. Fund the early childhood sector appropriately. It's time that the low salaries of early childhood teachers stop subsidising parents' access to the workforce.

The access to high quality early education and care should be viewed as a right for every child in Australia. The wellbeing of the child is directly impacted by the quality of the care and education they receive. Access to high quality early education and care gives a strong foundation for learning and a positive trajectory in schooling.

It should be part of society's commitment to the well being of its citizens. Workforce participation of parents is a beneficial flow on as opposed to being the only focus

It is extremely short sighted to view child care and early learning as solely a workforce participation issue.

Access to high quality early education and care is an investment in the people who will become the workforce in 20 years time.

I would be happy to discuss any of the concerns highlighted here.

Kind regards

Margaret Gleeson