

CAREWEST LTD. RESPONSE TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT ON CHILDCARE

Please find response to the Productivity Commission Draft Report into Child Care from CareWest Ltd, dated Friday 5th September 2014.

This response includes a number of comments (italicised) made by our early childhood educators employed in our preschools working face to face with children every day.

Families using mainstream services — improving the accessibility, flexibility and affordability

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.2

The Australian Government should combine the current Child Care Rebate, Child Care Benefit and the Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance funding streams to support a single child-based subsidy, to be known as the Early Care and Learning Subsidy (ECLS). ECLS would be available for children attending all mainstream approved ECEC services, whether they are centre-based or home-based.

“Having a single subsidy to overarch CCR, CCB & Jet is certainly a more effective way to go within systems.”

CareWest broadly supports this recommendation as it will make it easier for families and it does simplify the current complicated system. However, we express concern at the fact that it would only be available for “approved services” i.e. .long day care. family day care. Preschools, including mobile services are currently classed as “registered care”, and limited CCB is currently available.

CareWest recommends that the Early Care and Learning Subsidy be available for both approved and registered care.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.4

The Australian Government should fund the Early Care and Learning Subsidy to assist families with the cost of approved centre-based care and home-based care. The program should:

- *assist with the cost of ECEC services that satisfy requirements of the National Quality Framework*
- *provide a means tested subsidy rate between 90 per cent and 30 per cent of the deemed cost of care for hours of care for which the provider charges*
- *determine annually the hourly deemed cost of care (initially using a cost model, moving to a benchmark price within three years) that allows for differences in the cost of supply by age of child and type of care*
- *support up to 100 hours of care per fortnight for children of families that meet an activity test of 24 hours of work, study or training per fortnight, or are explicitly exempt from the criteria*
- *pay the assessed subsidy directly to the service provider of the parents' choice on receipt of the record of care provided.*

"I am for simplifying the government funded subsidy payment to parents. Yes, I think the subsidy should be means tested on an agreed cost of care and this needs annual adjustment and review. I agree that funding should be provided to those services that meet the NQF."

However, CareWest notes that again this recommendation only refers to approved care services. CareWest agrees with means testing. We remain unsure of what "deemed cost of care" refers to. Will this be according to the market, or a standardised cost that takes into account the age of the child and the type of care provided? Not sure what the 100 hours clause means in respect of families who don't meet the work test. Does this mean that the most disadvantaged children can't access?

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.3

The Australian Government should exempt non-parent primary carers of children, and jobless families where the parents are receiving a Disability Support Pension or a Carer Payment from the activity test. These families should still be subject to the means test applied to other families.

CareWest is concerned that there is no mention of those unemployed parents who may be on Newstart allowance?

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.3

The Australian Government should abolish operational requirements that specify minimum or maximum operating weeks or hours for services approved to receive child-based subsidies.

Agree as long as services that are open for many hours, and/or overnight, are still subject to strict quality control.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.4

The Australian Government should remove caps on the number of occasional care places.

CareWest disagrees with this recommendation. This could mean that we could have large occasional care only places and/or many occasional children accessing mainstream services. We would consider that there may be adverse impacts to quality of care and secure attachment for children.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.5

Governments should allow approved nannies to become an eligible service for which families can receive ECEC assistance. Those families who do not wish their nanny to meet National Quality Standards would not be eligible for assistance toward the costs of their nanny.

National Quality Framework requirements for nannies should be determined by ACECQA and should include a minimum qualification requirement of a relevant (ECEC related) certificate III, or equivalent, and the same staff ratios as are currently present for family day care services.

Assessments of regulatory compliance should be based on both random and targeted inspections by regulatory authorities.

“No I don’t agree that nanny care should be subsidised. I believe the system would be rorted and it would be too hard to assess and regulate nannies within the NQF. If we include Nanny care I believe the standing of our profession as early childhood teachers may be diminished in the eyes of the community.”

CareWest does not support this recommendation. This would mean that anyone can get a Cert 111 and set up as a nanny without the supervision of

more highly qualified early childhood staff as in presently the case in Family Day Care schemes. Nannies operating in private homes would be difficult to police (especially in terms of numbers and ages of children in care) and to effectively monitor compliance with the NQF is unrealistic. CareWest believe this is a backwards step for children and for the maintenance of high quality for children in the early childhood sector.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.7

The Australian Government should simplify working holiday visa requirements to make it easier for families to employ au pairs, by allowing au pairs to work for a family for the full 12 month term of the visa, rather than the current limit of six months.

CareWest disagrees with this recommendation in the context of assessing quality early education and care. Whilst some families may employ au pairs to mind children for short periods of time, they should not be a substitute for properly regulated and high quality education and care for young children. If au pairs can work for 12 months in the early childhood sector, they should they be required to have some basic childcare training e.g. Cert 111.

Additional needs children and services — improving the accessibility, flexibility and affordability

DRAFT FINDING 5.1

Generally, Australian children are doing well developmentally and most are well prepared to begin formal schooling. Those who are less well prepared tend to be Indigenous children, children living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, children living in very remote areas and children from non-English speaking backgrounds. There is likely to be overlap across these groups.

CareWest would like to take issue with this statement on the basis of findings in the AEDI National Report 2012 which found that 22% of all Australian children are developmentally vulnerable in at least one measure of the AEDI, and Aboriginal children are twice as vulnerable at 44% on one or more measure. To say that Australian children are doing well when 1 in 5 or 1/5 are clearly not, is gilding the lily. The situation for Aboriginal children, disadvantaged children and those living in very remote communities is truly appalling – a National shame. We cannot accept the statement that these children are simply “less well prepared”.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.6

The Australian Government should establish three capped programs to support access of children with additional needs to ECEC services.

- *The Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy would fund the deemed cost of meeting additional needs for those children who are assessed as eligible for the subsidy. This includes funding a means tested proportion of the deemed cost of mainstream services and the ‘top-up’ deemed cost of delivering services to specific groups of children based on their needs, notably children assessed as at risk, and children with a diagnosed disability.*
- *The Disadvantaged Communities Program would block fund providers, in full or in part, to deliver services to specific highly disadvantaged community groups, most notably Indigenous children. This program is to be designed to transition recipients to child-based funding arrangements wherever possible. This program would also fund coordination activities in integrated services where ECEC is the major element.*
- *The Inclusion Support Program would provide once-off grants to ECEC providers to build the capacity to provide services to additional needs children. This can include modifications to facilities and equipment and training for staff to meet the needs of children with a disability, Indigenous children, and other children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.*

“I agree with the 3 types of capped funding programs suggested.”

CareWest agrees with all of the above recommendations, as long as the funded amounts are sufficient to meet the need, and funding is made available to preschools and mobile services as well as approved services.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.7

The Australian Government should continue to provide support for children who are assessed as ‘at risk’ to access ECEC services, providing:

- *a 100 per cent subsidy for the deemed cost of ECEC services, which includes any additional ‘special’ services at their deemed cost, funded from the Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy program*
- *up to 100 hours a fortnight, regardless of whether the families meet an activity test*
- *support for initially 13 weeks then, after assessment by the relevant state or territory department and approval by the Department of Human Services, for up to 26 weeks.*

ECEC providers must contact the state or territory department with responsibility for child protection within one week of providing a service to any child on whose behalf they apply for the ‘at risk’ Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy. Continuation of access to the subsidy is to be based on assessment by this department, assignment of a case worker, and approval by the Department of Human Services. The Australian Government should review the adequacy of the program budget to meet reasonable need annually.

CareWest supports all of the above recommendations. This is a positive step in the right direction for “at risk” children.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.8

The Australian Government should continue to provide support for children who have a diagnosed disability to access ECEC services, through:

- *access to the mainstream ECEC funding on the same basis as children without a disability and up to a 100 per cent subsidy for the deemed cost of additional ECEC services, funded from the Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy*
- *block funded support to ECEC providers to build the capacity to cater for the needs of these children, funded through the Inclusion Support Program.*

The relevant Government agency should work with the National Disability Insurance Agency and specialist providers for those children whose disability falls outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme, to establish a deemed cost model that will reflect reasonable costs by age of child and the nature and extent of their disability. Based on an assessment of the number of children in need of this service, and the costs of providing reasonable ECEC services, the Australian Government should review the adequacy of the program budget to meet reasonable need annually.

“There should be a consistent funding criteria for Commonwealth and state programs to support services that have children with additional needs enrolled. ISS funding should be increased to 100 hours per fortnight, and ISS funding be made available for children with high medical needs. IPSP funding should be amended to support children without a diagnosis who present with challenging behaviours or extreme anxieties. There should be greater consistency of assessment practices for students completing early childhood qualifications to ensure that they have the capacity to work effectively with children with additional needs.”

“I would recommend additional funding to support children with additional needs, and argue in favour of this in relation to the hundred hours, though an element of flexibility should be considered for regional/remotely based services. I would also like to see emergency funding (approx. 10 weeks/1 term) for non diagnosed children who may display challenging behaviours or who have suffered trauma.”

CareWest supports these recommendations.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 13.1

The Australian Government should continue support for the current block funded ECEC services for Indigenous children to assist their transition to mainstream ECEC funding (where there is a viable labour market).

Regulatory authorities should work with providers to assist them in satisfying the National Quality Framework and managing the transition to child-based funding arrangements.

CareWest offers basic support for this recommendation, on the basis that assistance will continue to be provided to those services where parents are unable to pay for the cost of care.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.2

Governments should plan for greater use of integrated ECEC and childhood services in disadvantaged communities to help identify children with additional needs (particularly at risk and developmentally vulnerable children) and ensure that the necessary support services, such as health, family support and any additional early learning and development programs, are available.

“An integrated, holistic approach in particular for isolated areas I have sense is the way forward for these communities in real need of assistance not only for early childcare education but in all areas for the children and families.”

“A broad concept, ensuring that no disadvantaged or vulnerable children in families are worse off through this process – particular concerns about the proposal to increase the work-study activity test to 24 hours per fortnight.”

CareWest agrees with this recommendation. Integrated service provision with a holistic approach is good for children and families, and particularly good for disadvantaged families who may be facing a multitude of complex issues. CareWest recommends that where possible, integrated services are located within local schools.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.5

The Australian Government should establish a capped ‘viability assistance’ program to assist ECEC providers in rural, regional and remote areas to continue to operate under child-based funding arrangements (the Early Care and Learning Subsidy and the Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy), should demand temporarily fall below that needed to be financially viable. This funding would be:

- *accessed for a maximum of 3 in every 7 years, with services assessed for viability once they have received 2 years of support*
- *prioritised to centre-based and mobile services.*

CareWest agrees with the concept of viability assistance for services in regional and remote areas, and recommends this commences as soon as possible. Not every service in remote locations experiences constant demand. CareWest agrees that mobile services are likely to be best placed to respond to changing demand and community demographics. Mobile services can be set up relatively quickly when demand is high, but can also be relocated when demand slows.

Preschool — supporting universal access

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.9

The Australian Government should continue to provide per child payments to the states and territories for universal access to a preschool program of 15 hours per week for 40 weeks per year. This support should be based on the number of children enrolled in state and territory government funded preschool services, including where these are delivered in a long day care service.

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 preschool.

“I believe the states should fund universal access to 15 hours of preschool one year prior to the start of school in all states of Australia, but I do not believe that parents should be punished by losing FTB if they chose not to take it up.”

“Support the recommendation that the Commonwealth should continue to fund 15 hours preschool, to be made through the transparent funding instrument such as the National Partnership.”

CareWest supports the retention of Universal Access, and agrees that the creation of additional preschools within schools is desirable. However, if all preschools merge with schools what will become of the community based sector? Can the schools accommodate such large numbers of children?

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.10

The Australian Government should provide per child preschool payments direct to long day care services for 15 hours per week and 40 weeks per year, where long day care services do not receive such funding from the states and territories.

CareWest registers its disagreement to this recommendation. This will favour for profit services. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that quality of service provision is higher in the not for profit sector. This money would be better spent in the creation of new not for profit preschool places.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.1

Payment of a portion of the Family Tax Benefit Part A to the parent or carer of a preschool aged child should be linked to attendance in a preschool program, where one is available.

“No I don’t agree that the family tax benefit should be given to parents only if they send their children to preschool. Some parents don’t want preschool for their children .”

CareWest does not support this recommendation. We suggest it would be better to offer an incentive rather than a punishment. This measure could also prove difficult to administer. Who, and what evidence would be required to say if a preschool place is “available”? What of the situation where there are services available but all child places are full?

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.9

Dedicated preschools should be removed from the scope of the National Quality Framework and regulated by state and territory governments under the relevant education legislation. The quality standards in state and territory education legislation should broadly align with those in the National Quality Framework. Long day care services that deliver preschool programs should remain within the National Quality Framework.

“It’s concerning that it is being suggested that preschools be removed from the NQF. I believe this has been so important in raising standards and the level of care within services. In the past preschools were exempt from the

accreditation process, and I think it is vital that all services go through the same processes. It seems as though preschool is being devalued.”

“Keep kindergartens and preschools within the NQF”.

“I am concerned by the proposal that dedicated preschools should be removed from the scope of the NQF.”

CareWest registers strong disagreement to this recommendation. This is backward step and will reduce quality. All early education and care facilities should be subject to the same quality assurance, and it should be transparent, so that parents and families can be assured that they are choosing good quality care for their children. The preschool sector has welcomed and embraced the introduction of the NQF. This recommendation would devalue the importance of preschools and is very short sighted..

Outside school hours care — improving the accessibility, flexibility and affordability

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.4

Governments should develop and incorporate into the National Quality Framework a nationally consistent set of staff ratios and qualifications for those caring for school age children in outside school hours and vacation care services. These requirements should take into consideration ratios that are currently acceptable for children during school hours, the uncertainty surrounding the additional benefits of more staff and higher qualifications, and the valuable contribution that can be made to outside school hours care services by less qualified older workers and university/TAFE students.

CareWest supports the development of a nationally consistent set of staff ratios and qualifications for OSHC, however we do not support any reduction in qualification standards and ratios. All children under 12 deserve high quality care, and where older workers and students may be employed, it should not be at the expense of more qualified staff.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.1

The Australian Government should ensure that the requirement (currently contained within the Child Care Benefit (Eligibility of Child Care Services for Approval and Continued Approval) Determination 2000) for most children attending an outside school hours care service to be of school age, is removed and not carried over into any new legislation.

“ I believe that OSHC services should retain the majority of children as school aged, so I am against the proposed change with that recommendation. I’m worried if this went ahead little children will get pushed from pillar to post and lose continuity of care from their primary carers. I think with our knowledge of attachment theory this would be damaging to young children even if it is convenient for working parents.”

CareWest does not agree with this recommendation. This could mean that preschool aged children can attend OSHC. This is not acceptable where children could move from a more highly regulated and higher quality setting into a lower one. As well, this could be damaging to preschool aged children who benefit from consistent care. There may be some possibility however, to allow preschool children to be cared for in extended hours arrangements within their regular early childhood centre with familiar staff.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.2

State and territory governments should direct all schools to take responsibility for organising the provision of an outside school hours care service for their students (including students in attached preschools), where demand is sufficiently large for a service to be viable.

“ I see a great need that is not being met in our areas out here in Parkes and Forbes and that is the availability of OSHC services. There are limited spots for OSHC here and attaching this to schools would be a great service for this area.”

CareWest supports this recommendation, with the provision that there be no lowering of early childhood regulations where preschool children attend an OHSC facility on their own campus.

Removal of ECEC assistance to some providers

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.3

Australian Government ECEC funding should be limited to funding approved ECEC services and those closely integrated with approved ECEC services, and not be allocated to fund social services that largely support parents, families and communities. Any further Australian Government support for the HIPPY program should be outside of the ECEC budget allocation.

CareWest cautiously supports this recommendation, even though there is a clear basis to acknowledge that programs such as HIPPY benefit children through supporting parents. It is not the core business of many early childhood service providers and could perhaps be better funded elsewhere. However, CareWest is a large multi faceted not for profit organisation and is currently a HIPPY provider as well as a provider of mobile preschool services. It may be necessary to examine an organisation's capacity to offer different service types on a case by case basis.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.6

The Australian Government should remove the In-Home Care category of approved care, once nannies have been brought into the approved care system.

CareWest disagrees with this recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 9.1

The Australian Government should remove the registered childcare category under the Child Care Benefit.

CareWest strongly disagrees with this recommendation. This will prevent all preschools from being able to access CCB.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.1

In line with the broad level recommendations of the Productivity Commission's 2010 study into the Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector, the Australian Government should remove eligibility of not-for-profit ECEC providers to Fringe Benefit Tax exemptions and rebates.

State and territory governments should remove eligibility of all not-for-profit childcare providers to payroll tax exemptions. If governments choose to retain some assistance, eligibility for a payroll tax exemption should be restricted to childcare activities where it can be clearly demonstrated that the activity would otherwise be unviable and the provider has no potential commercial competitors.

CareWest registers strong disagreement with the above recommendation. Removal of these benefits to the not for profit sector would have a dire and immediate impact on many organisation's viability. Wages can quite low in the not for profit sector compared to the for profit sector. As far as provision of early childhood care and education, there is clear evidence to suggest that the not for profit sector consistently delivers higher quality than services who want to deliver a good return to their shareholders.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.1

The Australian Government should remove section 47(2) from the Fringe Benefits Tax Act 1986, that is, the eligibility for Fringe Benefit Tax concessions for employer provided ECEC services. It should retain section 47(8), which enables businesses to purchase access rights for children of their employees without this being considered an expenditure subject to the Fringe Benefits Tax.

CareWest disagrees with this recommendation

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DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.11

The Australian Government should redirect any additional tax revenue gained, or administrative savings from, removing ECEC related tax exemptions and concessions to expand the funding envelope for ECEC.

For not-for-profit providers of block funded ECEC services to children with additional needs, the tax savings should be included in their block funding arrangements while these programs continue under the current funding agreements.

Workforce participation

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 6.1

The Fair Work Ombudsman, and employer and employee associations should trial innovative approaches to:

- *increase awareness about the ‘right to request flexible work arrangements’ and individual flexibility arrangements under the Fair Work Act 2009 and National Employment Standards*
- *promote positive attitudes among employers, employees and the wider community towards parents, particularly fathers, taking up flexible work and other family-friendly arrangements.*

CareWest has strong support for these good and positive measures which will benefit many families.

Quality assurance processes and regulation of ECEC

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.8

Governments should extend the scope of the National Quality Framework to include all centre and home based services that receive Australian Government assistance. National Quality Framework requirements should be tailored towards each care type, as far as is feasible, and minimise the burden imposed on services.

“The NQF should be tailored for all service types including for us Mobile Children’s Services.”

CareWest supports this recommendation, on the proviso that the scope of the NQF is also extended to all state funded early childhood services as well. Mobile services in particular, look forward with anticipation into coming “in scope” under the NQF.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.1

To simplify the National Quality Standard, governments and ACECQA should:

- *identify elements and standards of the National Quality Standard that can be removed or altered while maintaining quality outcomes for children*
- *tailor the National Quality Standard to suit different service types — for example, by removing educational and child-based reporting requirements for outside school hours care services.*

CareWest disagrees with this recommendation. NQF has been good for the sector and has resulted in higher quality. This is a backwards step.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.2

Requirements for educators in centre-based services should be amended by governments such that:

- *all educators working with children aged birth to 36 months are only required to hold at least a certificate III, or equivalent*
- *the number of children for which an early childhood teacher must be employed is assessed on the basis of the number of children in a service aged over 36 months.*

“To suggest that a Cert 111 is only required for the under 3’s is ridiculous. It is already hard enough to be seen as educators in Early Childhood without taking this backward step and being seen as merely baby sitters. I think that a Cert. 111 is there to support other more qualified staff and not take on a leadership roll, it is about delivering high quality education.”

“There seems to be importance placed on disadvantaged children being able to access care which is great but what is the point if it is lower in quality?”

“Qualification requirements for under 3 year olds should be kept at a high qualification of Diploma and above. Research tells us that the first 5 years are the most important stages of development for children and is indicative of how a child will continue to develop later on in life as well. Every service has complex needs around staffing and this may not always be achieved, however to reduce that requirement makes it very easy for services to recruit lesser experienced and qualified staff and look no further and for some providers this unfortunately comes down to a dollar figure. I can see this reducing the daily fee structure for families as this age group is the most expensive to cater for and that’s the angle the commission is coming from. Unless you have a very experienced educator who is Cert III and working towards a Diploma, the Cert III is an introduction to childcare and is great for those supporting those with higher qualifications. I am very concerned at relaxing the requirements for educators and carers for children under 3 years to Cert III.”

“I see this as providing or presenting a very severe risk for the youngest children in our community”

“Research evidence as conducted by Professor Harrison, reflects the results of quality environments and services for infants and toddlers having a positive impact on children later in schooling. She has alluded that educators’ qualifications are the highest indicator of good quality in services.”

CareWest strongly disagrees with this recommendation for many reasons. This would mean that children under 3 only require care and education by a person with the minimal qualification of a Cert 111, and that services caring for children under 3 do not need a teacher at all. This would result in an explosion of baby minding factories, where quality does not matter, and the dollar rules. This is indeed a backward step to the many wonderful achievements in early childhood over the past 10 years, and would be a black day for young children and their parents.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.3

Differences in educator-to-child ratios and staff qualification requirements for children under school age across jurisdictions should be eliminated and all jurisdictions should adopt the national requirements.

CareWest registers cautious agreement, but only if the highest current standards (NSW) are adopted.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.5

To provide services with greater flexibility to meet staffing requirements, ACECQA should:

- remove the requirement that persons with early childhood teacher qualifications must have practical experience for children aged birth to twenty four months*
- explore ways to make the requirements for approving international qualifications simpler and less prescriptive in order to reduce obstacles to attracting appropriately qualified educators from overseas.*

All governments should allow services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios, such as by maintaining staffing levels on average (over a day or week), rather than at all times.

The New South Wales and South Australian Governments should allow a three month probationary hiring period in which unqualified staff may be included in staff ratios before beginning a qualification, as was recently adopted in all other jurisdictions.

"I can't believe that ratios and qualifications may be lowered. Suggesting that centres will be able to temporarily operate with staffing levels below ratio is compromising quality education, not to mention the stress placed on staff. I would suggest that this would have a big impact on attracting staff and keeping them! There does not seem to be much importance placed on an early childhood educator. I would suggest educators holding higher qualifications enable higher quality care."

"I don't think it is going to provide the best outcomes for the children if services are able to be temporarily operated with the staffing levels below required ratios. I would just have real concerns for services around this."

"I do not agree that education and care are separated or dependent on a child's age."

"I believe everyone working with young children in a service should hold a Cert 111 as a minimum, or should be actively studying to obtain it within a specified period, or they can't be hired."

"Current ratios as well as requirements for teachers for 0 to 3 year olds should be maintained due to the benefits for child development."

CareWest registers strong disagreement in regard to practical experience for new teachers. Teachers need experience with younger children to consolidate and expand their knowledge of child development.

CareWest agree with recommendation regarding overseas qualifications but only where there is some sort of benchmark to equate them with Australian qualifications.

CareWest strongly disagrees to temporary operation below ratios. This is a basic child safety risk and would be open to roting. All children deserve consistent ratios, and safe and adequate supervision, which cannot occur with low numbers of staff. Ratios exist for a very good reason.

CareWest disagree with 3 month period for unqualified staff. All staff must hold a minimum Cert 111 or be actively studying towards Cert.111 prior to employment.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.6

Governments and ACECQA should:

- *urgently reconsider the design of the assessment and ratings system, giving particular consideration to finding ways to increase the pace of assessments*
- *explore ways to determine services' ratings so they are more reflective of overall quality*
- *abolish the 'Excellent' rating, so that 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' is the highest achievable rating.*

"The excellent rating should remain under the assessment process for services. Services need a benchmark that recognises excellence."

CareWest disagrees with all of the above recommendation. No changes should be made until all early childhood education and care services have been through the Assessment and Rating Process otherwise it is unfair, and impossible to conduct an adequate evaluation of the program. There should be no dampening down of national standards. We should keep the "excellent" rating to serve as a benchmark for other services, and to recognize and celebrate outstanding achievement in the sector.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.7

Governments, ACECQA and regulatory authorities, as applicable, should:

- *abolish the requirement for certified supervisor certificates*
- *provide more detailed and targeted guidance to providers on requirements associated with Quality Improvement Plans, educational programming, establishing compliant policies and procedures and applying for waivers*
- *explore potential overlaps between the National Quality Framework and state and local government requirements as part of the ongoing review of the Framework, and ensure any identified overlaps are eliminated*
- *review:*

- *ways that services with higher ratings ('Exceeding National Quality Standard') could be relieved of some paperwork requirements, where these are less important to ensuring quality given the service's compliance history*
- *removing the requirement for outside school hours care services operating on school facilities to provide site plans as a condition of service approval.*

CareWest disagrees on abolishing requirements for certified supervisors. In any case, this has already changed, with services now being able to appoint a certified supervisor from their existing staff, but it should remain to allow certified supervisors to move to Nominated Supervisors.

CareWest agrees with providing more guidance for QIPs, programming etc.

CareWest agrees with the recommendation relating to the examination of overlaps between NQF and state requirements.

With regard to relieving services with higher ratings of some of the burden of paperwork, it should be noted that these are the type of services least likely to experience difficulty with paperwork. CareWest would instead suggest providing greater support and assistance to those services with lower ratings.

CareWest disagrees with the recommendation to remove site plans for OHSC services to supply site plans on the basis of child safety.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.10

State and territory governments should, as a matter of priority, harmonise background checks for ECEC staff and volunteers by either:

- *advancing a nationally consistent approach to jurisdiction-based 'working with children checks' as proposed in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, including mutual recognition of these checks between jurisdictions, or*
- *implementing a single, nationally recognised 'working with children check'.*

CareWest strongly supports this recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.11

Governments should remove those food safety requirements in the National Regulations that overlap with existing state and territory requirements.

State and territory governments, in conjunction with Food Standards Australia New Zealand, should explore the possible exemption of childcare services from Standard 3.3.1 of the Australian food safety standards, as in New South Wales.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.12

Local governments should adopt leading regulatory practices in planning for ECEC services. In particular, local governments should:

- use planning and zoning policies to support the co-location of ECEC services with community facilities, especially schools*
- use outcomes based regulations to allow services flexibility in the way they comply with planning rules, such as in relation to parking*
- not regulate the design or quality of any aspect of building interiors or children’s outdoor areas within the service property, where such regulation duplicates or extends the requirements of the National Regulations or other standards such as the Building Code of Australia*
- not impose regulations that interfere with the operation of the ECEC market, such as by restricting the maximum number of permitted childcare places in a service*
- provide clear guidelines for the assessment of development proposals in relation to ECEC services, and update these guidelines regularly.*

State planning departments should, as in Victoria, develop flexible standard planning provisions that can be applied across local governments to ensure some level of consistency; and scrutinise amendments to local planning schemes that might seek the introduction of different standards to guard against potentially costly requirements being imposed.

CareWest supports most of this recommendation. However, we express some concerns re. dot point 4 “not impose regulations that interfere with the ECEC market”.

Even though local government has little power to do this anyway, we should remember the ABC experience when we saw how allowing the market and financial availability of land to dictate solely where services were built without any planning or modelling on what ECEC services were actually needed, proved disastrous. We need an even distribution of services according to demographic and social need. However, this may need to be regulated by bodies other than local councils.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 11.1

Governments should ensure, through regulatory oversight and regular audits by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, that Registered Training Organisations maintain consistently high quality standards in their delivery of ECEC-related training.

CareWest supports this recommendation.

Ongoing support for evaluation and program assessment

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.4

Early intervention programs to address the development needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be underpinned by research. Their impact on the development outcomes of the children attending should be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including through the use of longitudinal studies.

CareWest supports this recommendation.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 13.2

The Australian Government should establish a program to link information for each child from the National ECEC Collection to information from the Child Care Management System, the Australian Early Development Index, and NAPLAN testing results to establish a longitudinal database.

Subject to appropriate data protection methods, this information should be made available for research, policy analysis and policy development purposes. The ability of researchers to access unit record information should be permitted subject to stringent privacy and data protection requirements.

The Australian Government agency, which is the custodian of the Child Care Management System, should provide a de-confidentialised extract from the database each year that interested parties can use for research and planning purposes.

CareWest offers support for this recommendation with caution. Anything that allows research, policy analysis and planning is useful, but strong confidentiality guidelines need to be put in place.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 13.3

The Australian Government should review the operation of the new ECEC funding system and regulatory requirements after they have been implemented. In particular:

- within 2 years of introducing subsidies based on deemed cost of care, the accuracy of the deemed costs and appropriateness of the selected indexation approach should be examined and the existence of any adverse unintended outcomes should be identified and resolved***
- within 3 years of extending the coverage of the National Quality Framework (including to current block funded services and to nannies), ACECQA should prepare a report identifying any legislative, regulatory or procedural difficulties arising from the wider coverage of the National Quality Framework***
- within 5 years of implementing the new ECEC funding system and regulatory requirements, the Australian Government should undertake a public review of the effectiveness of the revised arrangements***

CareWest agrees with the need for regular and timely review of the funding arrangements for the sector.