

This submission to the Australian Government Productivity Commission: Childcare and Early Learning has been prepared by Judy Powell who has been registered as a Family Day Care Educator for twenty one years..

Quality Childcare Definition

If one of the terms of reference for the commission (p. iii) is to provide quality childcare then this term needs to be examined more fully. Care can be defined in two ways: structural and process. For the most part structural care (ratios, staff qualifications, group sizes) is easily evaluated wherein process care (relationships, partnerships, continuity of care, interactions and planned experiences for children) although not easily assessed, has a bigger impact on social and emotional outcomes for children. Cloney, Page, Turner & Church (2013) state structural care does not automatically equate to improved outcomes for children:

http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/Policy_Brief_25_Quality.pdf).

If there are to be inherent trade-offs to improve the quality of childcare (Australian Government Productivity Commission p.3) it must be evidence based and wherein a 1:4 ratio for under school age in family day care has been equated to providing quality care, there is no independent research to substantiate this position. In fact the 1:4 ratio has incurred a loss of income for FDC educators in Tasmania, increased cost for families, and reduced childcare choice for families and funding for co-ordination units. A study by the University of Melbourne (Bohanam, Davis, Corr, Priest & Huong, 2012) published in the Australasian Journal of Early Childhood 37(4), 138-144, discussed the lack of research conducted within family day care in Australia and the researchers state that as family day care is a distinctive cultural service, overseas studies are not relative. Is it not possible to place FDC in a strength based perspective, particularly in terms of continuity of educator (attachment theory) which has not been considered in the quality care debate? An Early Childhood Education article, although centre based, outlines the importance of primary caregiving, which is a major component of the family day care model contributing to better social and emotional outcomes for

children: http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/australian_journal_of_early_childhood/ajec_index_abstracts/attachment_theory_and_primary_caregiving.html
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This is further reinforced wherein the following study aligns academic performance with emotional development (including self-regulation of emotions and behaviour) and successful relationships as the foundation of school readiness. http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp2/

ECEC in Other Countries

In referring to features of ECEC in other countries (p.7), there is one feature of home-based care in New Zealand that could be adapted to Australian ECEC and that is funding of a qualified workforce. <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/Funding/FundingHandbook/Chapter3/3B4HomeBasedECEServices.aspx>

In New Zealand family day care schemes are funded based on the level of qualifications of educators. Using this as a model, extra funding would provide an incentive for family day care educators to qualify past certificate III, particularly as qualifications figure so prominently in the quality care definition. At the present time there is no career path for family day care educators. FDC educators and schemes set their own rates and there is no correlation between experience/qualifications and fees. This inequity could be addressed through an extended registration (1:5 ratio under school age), tax rebates or direct subsidy by the government for qualifications and experience. This approach would also address retention rates, long term commitment by educators and an improved/qualified workforce.

Workforce Participation

It is important to acknowledge the ECEC workforce and address their rights in this document. The section 'Impacts on Workforce Participation' (p.12) serves to alienate the childcare workforce as separate wherein a third question should be:

What trade-offs do ECEC services and staff make to keep their services viable and flexible?

The standard working day hours are the mainstay of family day care educator's income, and to provide a more flexible service equates to a longer working day, in some cases 24 hours with no break and intrusion on family time. At what point do the rights of one workforce/worker override the rights of another? It is interesting that on page iv (TOR) this enquiry does not recognise that a major component of the ECEC workforce is women who also need supporting with appropriate working conditions, including remuneration and recognition.

Children's Developmental Needs

Further to the second question on page 12, when assessing time spent in ECEC and the age a child first enters childcare, this should be expanded to include what parents require from the ECEC service. For some children, there is a need for socialisation which is diminished with a 1:4 ratio for children aged 3-5 years in family day care. There is no provision for family day care to provide a programme for 3-5 year old children with appropriate ratios,

although not 1:10 but a 1:5/1:6. If school readiness is vital for the social and economic future of this country, more opportunities should be provided for early childhood qualified workers to provide these programmes – in schools, centre based care or family day care.

School Readiness

Another point is to educate ECEC services on what is meant by the term school readiness. There is a tendency to focus mainly on the foundations of numeracy and literacy, whereas both the AEDI domains (<http://userguide.aedi.org.au/Understanding/About-the-AEDI/The-AEDI-Domains.aspx>) and a study by the Royal Children's Hospital (http://ww2.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB10_SchoolReadiness.pdf) outline the importance of all the developmental domains in terms of school readiness including social, emotional, physical, language, literacy and cognitive development. Funded training is one way to address this shortfall in understanding.

Availability and Cost of Childcare and Early Learning Services

The use of the word 'centres' on page 17 in the section 'seeking evidence on vacancies' is an unfortunate mistake. 'Services' is a much more inclusive term.

The Commission is seeking to gain information on growth, demand and viability pressures in ECEC, while policies implemented on 1/1/14 impact negatively in FDC in all these areas. Up to 10,000 childcare spaces have been lost and family day care educators in Tasmania have had their ratios reduced which in turn has reduced their income by 20% unless this cost is passed onto families. The NQF has resulted in increases in the cost of childcare and in FDC there will be further increases as it will be necessary to subsidise co-ordination units who are facing a decrease in operational funding due to a decrease in EFTs.

Flexibility must be weighed against viability as it is difficult to fill every hour worked in family day care with a full complement of children, particularly outside peak hour care. In addition, the hours worked in family day care already extends past hands-on-childcare. Cleaning, paperwork, planning, tax, meetings, and training are all legitimate working hours and cannot always be conducted during the hours children are in attendance. I currently work 10-12 hours (conservative) a week outside child attendance hours and taking these non-attendance hours into consideration, I calculate that I am currently earning \$17.05 an hour net income as an early childhood teacher. In addition, separate bedrooms must be provided for children attending overnight care (gender specific) and not many average households running a family day care business would have two spare bedrooms.

Cost of Childcare

The economies of scale disadvantages family day care through ratio limitations wherein a qualified early childhood teacher in family day care has a ratio of 1:4 children aged 3-5 years, yet centre based care ratio for the same age group is 1:10. Every school in my area has a school holiday programme and outside school hour service and with a 1:15 ratio, and I am unable to financially compete with these services. Further a mixed age grouping formula can be applied in centre based care yet the same formula is unable to be implemented into family day care.

Government Regulations of Childcare and Early Learning

Prior to the implementation of the NQS I was able to enrol 5 children resulting in a net income of \$21.33 an hour, whereas the 1:4 ratios has decreased net income by \$4.28 an hour. This is demoralising and does little to lift the professionalism and profile of family day care.

Workforce Issues and Effects of the National Quality Framework

The effect of staff ratios has been discussed above along with the need to provide a career path in family day care to increase the qualification threshold. A tiered structure for family day care would encourage educators to invest in their businesses as a long term venture, rather than a stop gap for something 'better'. Whereas many educators do qualify further to diploma level, there needs to be further incentives for educators to train further.

Support Provided by Governments

It is very confusing for families to be allocated a variety of numbers and codes including customer reference numbers and enrolment identifications.

If childcare (e.g nannies) is funded will they be regulated and accredited to ensure quality service?

There is an onus on this inquiry to ensure peak bodies who deem to speak for ECEC, are in fact communicating with the ECEC sector in order to truly represent them.