

United Voice Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning



QUALITY MATTERS: INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE Appendix 2: United Voice member submissions

This submission has been prepared by United Voice National Office on behalf of United Voice early childhood education and care members across Australia.

Authorised by Louise Tarrant, National Secretary, United Voice – The Childcare Union, 303 Cleveland Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.

For more information contact:

Dr Kate Hepworth:

Ms Madeleine Holme:

Jenny Hayward, Director, Moreton Downs Early Education

I am writing this submission on behalf of the staff at Moreton Downs Early Education. At Moreton Downs we have a mixed range of qualifications and years of experience so we have the benefit of knowing and understanding the childcare sector quite well and the different changes that have occurred over the years.

The most significant changes which are at the forefront of most Childcare Sector discussions is the lack of wages, staff to child ratios, qualifications and quality care for the children.

We believe that the children are our future and therefore have the right to be nurtured, supported and guided throughout the most critical stage of their lives. This however has become compromised with changes to our child/staff ratios (excessively putting staff in stressful situations because a piece of paper says they should be able to handle it), qualifications (some 18 year olds straight out of high school are being able to look after a group of 12 children by themselves) and lack of wages in a professional sector (professional dedicated staff leaving the sector for higher paying jobs that have less responsibility and stress).

The general consensus amongst staff seems to be that they are continuously asked to further their knowledge in the sector by enrolling in further courses, attending professional development workshops in their own time and spending their own money and weekends making sure they have enough resources and rooms are set up to reflect the Early Learning Years Framework but not having a wage which reflects this commitment, dedication and responsibility.

All staff within the childcare sector consider themselves to be Professional Educators making differences in the lives of young children and yet are made to feel like nothing more than everyday babysitters. We should be retaining our quality staff to ensure quality care is kept in the sector.

We the staff at Moreton Downs Early Education are passionate about the childcare sector and recognise the need for improvements. We would like you to read our submission and take the time to review, recognise and fix the Childcare sector which is one of the most important industries available.

Anne Marie, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Mount Lousia

I am writing this submission on behalf of the staff at my Centre of Goodstart Mt Louisa 1 and 2. I am a centre director that look after 24 to 25 staff member a day as well as up to 120 children per day. We are a double centre. My educators are mostly diploma qualified and Certificate III qualified. Out of the 25 staff members I also have three staff members that are currently studying a Bachelor of Early childhood. This is so they are able to receive a better pay and work conditions.

I personally have 15 years' experience with in the sector and I have worked within a variety of different centre. Community bases, private centres. I have worked the majority of my career within ABC/Goodstart centres. During my time within the sector I have worked in all the rooms and with many different families. Most of my staff members have worked within the sector for a long time. For them this is their career of choice and they have a passion for children and their education.

Over the years in the sector we have seen lots of changes and some for the better and some for the worse. I have posed a few questions to my staff members as well as my parents about the future of child care and how they feel about the changes that have occurred. The following questions were asked to the staff members in relation to working within the Childcare and education sector.

Staff members have said the following in relation to working in early childhood and care sector

- "I like the role and love the interactions with the children however it is sometimes hard to get what is needed with rostering and money restrictions."
- "To have an extremely important role that impacts on every child and their future is also a huge responsibility that is not taken lightly. Research for year has supported the facts that the first five years are the most formative and important. Therefore we need to be great educators."
- "It can be very rewarding and I enjoy working with children and I like that every day is different. The children's change and grow and I am a big part of that."
- "I enjoy working with children and making them happy that is rewarding but the stress and strain of constant changes in the sector, poor pay take their toll on moral and physical wellbeing."
- "It's rewarding in the sense of achievement with the children's growth and abilities but extremely stressful and draining both the emotional and physically."

I asked my colleagues, what does quality look like to you? What changes (if any) need to happen to achieve quality? They said the following:

- "More support within the services lower ratios to improve equal interactions, more funding toward compulsory study/training, more programing time allocated to both lead educators and support educators."
- "Happy staff provides a happy environment which encourages a good productive environment for quality care to thrive which keeps standards high."
- "Staff who want to work in childcare and genuinely enjoy what they do and strive to do the best they can. This can only be achieved if staff do not have to work about how they are going to pay their bills."
- "It takes time to achieve quality, time to completed paper work regarding daily conversations achievements, challenges, growth, and time to nurture children individually and challenge thinking. It takes time to be professional."

- "We are too underpaid to keep quality staff. The sector needs people who are passionate and strive to provide quality."

What part do you think professional wages play in ensuring quality and parent confidence?

- "Quality educator will make parents happy and confident that their children are in the right environment."
- "A lot of parents come through and ask the qualification of staff members and they want to know that there are educated people looking after and educating their children."
- "Simply having the ability to offer professional wages that also equate to the professional quality development of staff means that those amazing educators that we see leaving the sector to find higher paying jobs with staff and support the quality of the sector as a whole."
- "Parents also will treat us as educators rather than over paid and over qualified baby sitters. Professional wages will help staff feel secure and safe within their job choice as well as home life and this reflects in the great work that they do."
- "Happy staff means happy children and parents."
- "Staff feel they are valued and the wages are appropriate to their role. This in turn makes staff feel appreciated and valued rather than exploited."
- "It is about valuing the educators if we feel that we are undervalued there is no drive to succeed and have devotion to work."
- "Families will also have more respect for the sector."
- "Not just families have a respect for the sector but the wider community."

What impact does staff turnover have on children and families?

- "An enormous impact on families and they need to feel safe and secure within the centre. They also need to feel that their children have continuity of care and constant staff turnover causes stress for families, children and staff."
- "Staff turnover has a very negative impact on the children as they get used to a staff member and then they leave as this happens for families, they develop a bond with staff."
- "Relationships with children, families and staff impacts greatly on how well children settle and become interested and community minded."
- "Children have lower chances of building a secure attachment with educators and families also lose trust and confidence within the sector and may seek care elsewhere."
- "What role does the NQF play in achieving quality? What is your experience of the 'paperwork' that goes with it?"
- "The concept is great however the planning and evaluation requires extreme detail and in turn creates a huge work load for the educators resulting in after-hours dedication and devotion. Again something that their wages do not reflect."

- “There is a lot of paperwork with minimum time to completed it is without forfeiting quality time and spending time outside of work completing again wages do not reflect the amount of time planning and programing and ensuring that everything is meeting requirements.”

Your ideas for how Early Childcare Education and Care can be improved?

- Realistic pay and that is appropriate to the role that we play within the lives of many children. Better time allowance and realistic expectation of paper work. Training to be paid for and not done with in our own time.
- Wages do go a long way to ensure quality care an staff who want to work in the sector and are passionate and children
- Development in the sector and knowledge about the NQF and EYLF support by all staff having professional develop time (non-contact and paid) as well as current programing time per week to keep high performing educators. Again Wages to reflect this.
- As you can see the staff had lots to say about their work conditions and one key point that did come back was the lack of wages. The wages do not equate to the amount of work that is done by staff every day. We all understand that sometimes things need to be done in our own times however on average staff are working 2 to 3 hours after work to complete paper work and meet standards.
- The staffs here at Goodstart Mt Louisa are passionate about the work that they do as well as the quality care that they provide.
- We do not just hire staff member because they have the necessary qualification we look at what quality’s they bring to the centre as well as making sure they are the right fit for the children and the team.

It takes talented and dedicated staff members to make a centre successful.

We also feel that as a sector we need to be acknowledged for the great work that we do every day and the difference we make in the lives of the children we educate each day. Everyone has a passion for working with children and it is about time that this is recognised.

Rajneet Sangha, Early Childhood Teacher, Tallowood Child Care Centre

My name is Rajneet Sangha and this is my seventh year in the early childhood sector and my second year as a full-time kindergarten teacher / nominated Supervisor in a long day care setting. My days are long and exhausting, working eight hours days and I don’t continue to stay in this sector because I am recognised for my passion or because I am seen as a professional and definitely not because I am paid enough for it. I thoroughly enjoy working in the early childhood sector and the one and only reason I continue to stay in this sector is because I am passionate about the importance of children’s early years of education, I believe we are the foundation before children’s school years.

With seven years of experience in this sector I have seen the level of staff coming into the sector and let me tell you that it's not getting better but worse. I enrolled to do my Diploma of children's Services at TAFE in 2007; this took me two years full-time. While in my second year of my Diploma I enrolled at Griffith University to do my Bachelor of Child and Family Studies I spent one year doing both TAFE and University full-time. I finished my degree in 2010 but I still wasn't satisfied with my level of education so I enrolled again in university this time to do my Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education, I finished this in 2012. I have spent 6 years in tertiary education and now can someone please remind me how quickly you can complete your Certificate III or Diploma? It only takes six months . What a joke! You expect someone with such little understanding about early childhood development to care for and educate our future generation.

What I see when I look at staff in our sector are lazy, undedicated, un-educated staff. These staff members have very little understanding of child development, inability to maintain a room on their own, no passion or enthusiasm when interacting with children and in fact avoid any interaction with children. These staff cannot implement a program and have no idea about how to set-up a room to meet the needs of the children in their rooms. This is unfair on those staff that have that ability and who put in every bit of energy they have.

What does quality look like? Well look around you, look at all of the hard work these dedicated staff put into their jobs. We do countless hours of work; there is simply not enough time in our eight hour day that we end up taking work home. I can have up to 36 children on my role over the week and for each of these children I implement and write individualised learning stories. Within my kindergarten room I implement to different learning frameworks, the Early Years Learning Framework and The Queensland Kindergarten Guidelines. Now what Education Queensland teacher would you see doing this?

I enjoy my job and continue to be very passionate but very quickly, day by day I am losing hope and there is nothing keeping me here. An Education Queensland teacher in their first year of full-time work receives an annual salary of \$58,437, with this continuing to rise excessively year by year. I am lucky if I even make \$50, 000 annually with no hope of a pay rise. Something needs to be done or any decent kindergarten teacher will be look for their next big thing, there is nothing stopping us from going to a school.

How will communities and families ever take us seriously if the Government doesn't even take us seriously? We are not babysitters; we are educators who provide high quality care and educational programs. To be even be seen as professional, the Government needs to take action and make some changes how can I effectively run a kindergarten program while I am trying to implement two frameworks with a group of children ranging between the ages of 3-5 and 24 children in my room per day – this is not quality and this why we are not taken seriously. I would like to run a kindergarten program for children aged between 4-5 with a maximum of 20 children but I don't see this ever changing.

How are we going to change this? We have some really experienced staff with great educations and great understanding of early childhood development, who implement some fantastic programs. The only way to fix this is with a wage increase, we need to be recognised for what we do and actually be treated like professional with professional wages. I am strongly suggesting that kindergarten teachers be paid the same as teachers in the school system, after all it was the Queensland Government who introduced this initiative so maybe they should do something about it.

Nicole Lobegeiger, Supervisor, Amberley Child Care Centre

I began working in the field of child care back in 1996 as a school leaver. Since that time there have been some significant changes to the sector, some have been significant improvements. I have been at my current centre for almost 15 years. While a lot has changed in this time, what hasn't changed is my love for what I do each day and the difference I can make to the children and their families. I come to work to educate and care for each child in my care, I come to work to mentor my fellow colleagues so they too can make a difference to the lives of the children that we educate and care. Each day myself and my fellow educators come to work to endeavour to assist each child to learn something new, something they can do or something they have learnt about themselves.

For the centre that I work at, the majority of the families, are 2 parents working, working long hours 5 days a week. The educators at our centre are the most familiar people in the children's lives. We endeavour to be part of the lives of every child in our centre, but due to the low pay that many of the staff receive, we often have staff that stay only a short time. When this occurs we in turn have to pay, agency or casual staff to replace our educators, this in turn costs a lot more money that could have been spent of resources for the children in our care.

Over the years of experience that I have had in sector of child care, I have seen many things change but the way educators are represented in the field needs to be changed. **We don't** come to the centre each day to baby sit children, we come to our centre to provide education and care for each child. Each educator is now required to be qualified, they are required to study to get their Certificate III or higher. In relation to this we need to be seen in the profession as educators and paid as educators. Our experience needs to count as well, if someone has had several years' experience in the sector they need to be paid accordingly for this experience.

As the title Early Education and Care is introduced to the community we need to be respected by our Government, families and community for our role in educating the children in our care each day. We follow the Early Years Learning Framework and there is dedication displayed by our educators to ensure that this frameworks in always applied with our practices and curriculum. Many educators spend their own time doing a lot of preparation for the next day/week. This shows dedication to the sector from these educators. Many of my staff get to our centre early so they can prepare for their day with the children, so they can spend as much time as possible engaging and interacting with the children.

Judy Kuzma, Educator, Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre

Avis Kerr, Director, Nicholls Early Childhood Centre

Ros Thackray, Educator, Stardust Early Childhood Centre

ROS: It should be the child's right to receive quality (the very best there is to offer) and the right of every educator to provide the best they possibly can for the child otherwise we are failing this generation.

AVIS: Attracting people to the profession is not difficult; there are many school leavers and older people, who see this as an attractive career; either as a long term objective or as a stepping stone to other fields. With the current government incentives of free training and payments for offering traineeships, there is little cost to the centres to employ trainees. There is a bonus for centres as it provides additional staff who will eventually be available to fill any staff vacancies without having to advertise etc. Maintaining a level of high quality educators is difficult as after the initial training it takes several years of practical experience for the individual persons to become a highly skilled, competent educator. Unfortunately many leave the profession before reaching that level as they find that they are undervalued, underpaid and overworked for the remuneration they receive. On losing experienced, quality educators, many centres have to replace them with newly or partially trained people. This obviously reduces the skill level in individual services and the quality of the program being offered.

JUDY: Having educators who are trained and capable of managing a room of 12-15 toddlers (2-3year olds) or a room of 22 pre-schoolers (3-5year olds) is paramount for the safety and wellbeing of the children who are part of that environment for up to 8 -9 hours a day. Those who choose to complete the top level qualifications to be a successful ECEC educator or teacher are totally aware of the insignificant pay differential from a Level 3 where you assist in a programme; to a level 4 and that requires them to be in charge of establishing and implementing said programme. Many leave once they see how little financial gain after 2-3 years in the position will take them. Those who have a University qualifications choose not to work in a service designated LDC due to the lower pay rates even though the workload is the same as service designated Preschool.

AVIS: For anyone to develop a passion to work in this type of environment must have relevant qualifications and an aptitude to apply that knowledge daily. A higher wage would recognise the importance of the role of the early childhood educators. They would be less likely to seek other employment (using the skills already acquired) if they felt respected for their position and their wage was enough for the current cost of living. I have lost several quality, highly skilled educators, when they have had children of their own, as it is not financially viable for them to return to this profession and pay for childcare. Many have found better paying jobs, such as shelf stacking in the local supermarket, that can be done in the evenings when the other parent can take care of the baby. What a waste of training and experience!!

JUDY: Replacement is challenging. Often you have to start at the beginning - up skilling another person to continue where an experienced and already appropriately qualified Educator left off. This adds trials and tribulations to those remaining. This includes children and families having to re-adjust to a different application of programme and the establishment of the all-important 'connections'.

AVIS: The continual high level of staff turnover is costing the government a great deal of money as there is a constant stream of people taking up the training incentives, only to leave after a few years. Better wages would keep them in the profession and reduce the need for so many new trainings. Childcare is an important part of Australia's economy. Many of the women in the workforce have young children and their need for childcare is paramount to their availability for work. Without these women many industries and professions would struggle to find adequate employees. If women were unable to return to the workforce after having children there would be a huge shortage of experienced people in many workplaces. Most families use two incomes to afford mortgages, rents and the general costs of living; this money going into the Australian economy boosts all related industries e.g. Housing, groceries, retail, car manufacturing, travel etc. Childcare is paramount to the Australian economy. While childcare should continue to be paid for by the users, i.e. parents, there must be some extra funding available to ensure that Childcare professionals receive a suitable professional wage. If this has to be funded purely from parent fees, the childcare costs will be too high for most families and the result would be either using cheaper unregulated care, or not returning to work.

Community based (not for profit) childcare centres are generally cheaper than the private,(for profit) centres. But these would need to increase their fee by a substantial amount, to be able to pay professional wages. Government plans to research more flexible operating hours, will find that the biggest prohibiting factor is cost. There have been several enquiries into the viability of extended care hours (not nationally, but in local areas) and all have found that while there are some people who need the flexibility, there are not sufficient numbers to make it financially viable to offer the extended hours. A centre would need to have at least 3 staff during this time and their wages and other running costs would need to be covered. Educators should not be expected to work extended hours for the same pay rate as working during the day, and this would incur another cost.

JUDY: Flexible delivery of ECEC services to accommodate our society's modern complex working hours would prove to be a challenge. This factor may be important however children needs should not be compromised. Quality must be retained and the Federal Government must be prepared to put money in to fund such a plan so as it is viable option; and not expect the workforce to be paid a pittance to justify a government initiative that would not be deemed a costly option to families.

AVIS: The NQF is working towards childcare including Early Childhood Teachers in the staff ratios. While this is very desirable and would be of utmost advantage to the education and care

provided, this would also place an extra burden on the salary budget. Quality Costs! For childcare to comply with the NQF, the staff ratio, the qualifications, the reduced room numbers, we need to be able to retain the qualified experienced educators. It is impossible without the offer of a wage that is of a professional level.

JUDY: Compromise should not be an option, why should young children be valued less just because they are young and cannot speak for themselves? They deserve our respect and by maintaining the NQF and embracing all it has to offer, is an excellent acknowledgement of value. BUT it cannot stop there - appropriate remuneration for the workforce that hold relevant qualifications would be the scaffolding that would support the NQS and consolidate the value of young children as members of our society.

Maria Simonds, Director, Noahs Ark Kindergarten and Day Care Centre

I started my career in the Child Care and Kindergarten Sector in 1988 in a small private centre. Assistants at that time weren't required to do any study, then one day a mum asked me what qualifications I had. I took myself off to TAFE and did a Preschool Teachers Aide Course; all that was available then, I continued my studies until I completed my Advanced Diploma.

In 1994 I became a Director in a small private centre then continued this position. With Peppercorn Management, ABC, Ramsey and Bourne and Noah's Ark Kindergarten until I had to give up due to medical condition that affects me physically. My Friend Maria Simonds is now the Director of Noah's Ark Kindergarten and Child Care, so on behalf of myself and all concerned with private Child Care Centres I would like to give the big picture of what we do.

The responsibility of the Child Care Sector has always been under played. We are responsible of the most vulnerable age groups of children to keep safe, secure, and to assist them to develop their skills and to reach their developmental potential. This requires all staff / educators to recognise different patterns of development in young children and when necessary refer them to an Early Childhood Development Education Programs which works with the child, family and centre staff. Children who have been supported in this way have had disabilities in the areas of vision impairment, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, hearing impairment, speech/language impairment and autistic spectrum disorders. These advisory teachers then continue to work with the children when they move on to preschool when necessary. We work with other professional support agencies such as Red Cross Family Support, Child Safety and Inclusion Support.

We have to be able to take away the anxiety of parents and children by providing a safe haven for not only the children but the parents that entrust their children to our care.

Parents at time need assistance and support with events in their lives that also impact on the centre e.g. Family break ups, deaths in families' e.g. some parents and children due to car accidents, drowning, still birth and cancer.

We are responsible for the protection of the children in care which unfortunately requires us to report any family that raises concern. Thankfully and sadly I've only had to report a family to Child Protection twice. This was in two different centres years apart. We try to work with families to help them with their parenting skills by role modelling behaviour and organising relevant in- services for staff and parent e.g. Behaviour Management and Nutrition

The high staff turn overs in the sector is clearly linked to qualifications and the wage issues. The impact of staff changes not only affects the daily running on the service but also effects and impacts the children and families The Child Care Sector has one of the most important educational roles yet the educators are not recognised as the professionals they are.

Kristen Leedie, Leader, Vickers Road Community Childcare Centre

I am writing this submission on behalf of the staff and management committee at my centre. Our centre is a small not for profit community based centre in Townsville. I personally have worked in the childcare sector for 14 years, during this time I have worked for a variety of centres, including privately owned, corporate and community based. I have seen many changes over the years in the standards that are required of educators. I feel having a national standard is a benefit to all concerned and is proving to provide the highest quality of care and early education to our children.

All of our educators feel that working in childcare is a rewarding job. We have the privilege of watching and helping young children grow and develop. However, the ever changing expectations that are put onto staff with documentation and quality assurance means that there is a lot of pressure on staff through the day. This generally spills over to multiple tasks being taken home or completed after hours. At our service we have a variety of staff with varying experience in the sector. We have young school leavers that have been only working for a few months, staff whom have worked in the sector for a few years, and a few who have been in the sector for over 6 years. The select few staff that have been in the sector for over 6 years, have seen the many changes that have been made in regards to education and care, quality assurance, expectations of carers and documentation requirements. However, none of these staff have seen a pay rise to match the growing demands that the government is putting on the sector.

Quality to our educators means happy, enthusiastic, engaged staff, which recognise their importance and are acknowledged for the job they do. "Staff who are eager to grow and develop their knowledge and understanding of child development" (Dea Mitchell, Admin). A well-resourced centre with stimulating activities for children. "Quality means that children are being provided with the opportunities to explore and develop in a way that is supported and encouraged by educators"(Kelly Hess, Educator). "My son had four different assistant educators in less than 12 months, which made the environment hard for him to learn and settle into, quality to me means continuity of care" (Marilyn Wright, Parent)

Changes need to be made to secure our staff in the sector. At a centre level, the management committee provide staff in-service training and development opportunities. We keep qualifications, and first aid training up to date to ensure that we have the highest quality staff working with our children and families. This puts a strain on the centre financially, especially being that we are a community based, not-for-profit incorporation.

"Staff turnover can be detrimental to young children. They form strong relationships with educators and develop a trusting bond with them, this trust and confidence is lost when they have new staff every few months" (Sian Button, Educator). Statistics show that children need consistency, where there is no consistency relationships are hard to build, development may be hindered, trust is not given easily and routines are not formed. Parents will feel insecure leaving their children in the care of educators whom they have not built relationships with either. There is a high possibility that children will have behavioural difficulties, as the children crave and need routines and consistency.

"The NQF plays an important role in guiding centres across the sector in delivering a high quality service. The paperwork is demanding with all the documentation that is required. Staff spend a great deal of time trying to juggle this paperwork and find effective ways to incorporate it into their day".(Sheryn Hawken, Educator). Sometimes it is a struggle trying to juggle the amount of paperwork, as well as form relationships with the children. "The NQS provides an outline of the standards of quality care. It requires extensive paperwork to prove that the care we are providing meets the standards outlined in the NQF".(Carla Nicholls, Educator) "The paperwork that is required is a bit extreme for a "babysitting" role. However, if we were seen and treated as "professionals" then the paperwork meets the expectation of parents, management and the NQF". (Katrina Knapp, Nominated supervisor)

As educators we come to work to provide quality care to children as set out in the NQS, if there were no educators, then all other industries wouldn't be able to thrive, as there would be no care for children "As a parent I expect quality, meaningful and educational care for my children, I am not just looking for a babysitter". (Jade Gillam, parent committee)

Judy Kuzma, Director, Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre

This submission is on behalf of the educators at my centre. Educators were given three questions to answer

1. How important do you feel your job is?

All agreed that the role of an ECEC educator carries huge responsibilities and has major impact on those significant little lives. The challenges that occur daily we must handle appropriately for the quality delivery of engagement will have impact on a child's future. It is essential we get it right for the sake of every child. That all important 'sense of belonging' exists from the moment a child is born. It is paramount we continue developing that 'sense of belonging' as a

child grows; thus providing them with life skills that will assist them in coping with the changes they will face in their lives.

EVA: I feel my job is very important to the centre I work in. I help provide morning tea and afternoon tea for the children and help prepare their lunch. Making sure the kitchen is always clean and food is kept hygienic and kept safe in temperatures which stop bacteria from growing.

Haiying: I have always believed that early childhood educators play a valuable role in societies. As an early childhood educator, my day-to-day job poses huge power to influence and shape the future of Australia. The impact of how we perform our job with children will significantly affect their performance and achievement in the future.

2. How relevant your studies are in the workplace?

All commented on how essential all studies and professional development has provided them with the right tools to deliver a programme that is enticing, safe and challenging all at the same time. Ongoing professional learning opportunities must be done to ensure complete understanding and delivery of the NQS. Quality would not exist without the guidelines provided by NQF - it provides a safety net for all stakeholders. Knowing what must be done for the successful delivery of a quality programme is necessary for the sake of the prime users - children!

Haiying: Through studies, I gained more professional knowledge. It helps me to work professionally and confidently.

Laura: I think the studies that I have done previously is definitely relevant to my current workplace. However, in order to maintain my 'up to date knowledge', I also need to ensure that learning happens at workplace as well. I often consider that the workplace provides a rich source for learning and practical opportunities for knowledge transform into practice. The workplace enable and allows me to exam the outcome of my studies and consolidate my skills/strategies that can be utilise for my work.

Judy: I if didn't have training I would not know how best to meet the needs of all the individual children who attend the centre every day. No child is exactly like another and to be able to cope with all the variances that exist in a room of 22 children correctly, you need to have qualifications and skill to apply that knowledge and give each child a sense of success every day. The EYLF and NQF is so essential to maintaining an early childhood education and care system that is globally competitive.

3. Does your pay remunerate adequately the workload you are expected to do daily?

The following is the answer provided from just one of the educators listed above.

Amy Brady: The pay that I receive for the valuable position I hold does not adequately reflect the value of my role. Each week I document the learning of up to 50 children. I am also on the floor with these children actively engaging with them in their learning journeys. On top of this I also need to find the time to maintain routines such as toileting, meals, and rest periods and ensure that the room is cleaned up after experiences, meals, etc.. Currently I receive 10 hours non-contact time (shared with another educator) to document the learning of the children, plan the extensions of these learning experiences, evaluate all the learning journeys and programs that I have presented to the children and reflect on everything that I do each day. When you look at the number of children that are in our centre alone each week you can see that when an educator is provided with this non-contact time it is often not a long enough period of time so I find that I am often required to complete documentation when I am at home. I receive no income for this extra time spent outside of my normal hours in the centre but I find that if I do not dedicate myself to this the learning of the children is not adequately reflected in their documentation. My partner is a truck driver and he receives a higher pay than my own just to drive around our local community and deliver stock. How can it be that a person who has had to undertake no extra study to complete their job and has little contact with other people in their daily role can be paid a higher wage than someone who has undertaken 4 years of further study and is required to undertake a university course to further their education to climb within their chosen career path and improve their own future? Even then (when their courses are completed) the wage does not adequately reflect this dedication to their extremely important position within our society. Early Childhood Education and Care should be adequately acknowledged for the important contribution that we make to improve our society for these very important young people. Why is my role not seen as being important enough to pay me enough money so that I can live and not just survive?

Yongmei: Child care is an extremely high stress profession. Job progression in child care is slow and limited. Those with higher education are not recompensed to the same degree as other professional fields. It is a common belief amongst child care workers that they are not being recompensed fairly for their work undertaken.

NOTE: Yongmei left the sector after studying her Bachelor of Education. She is now working in a field where she has no relevant qualifications and yet is still earning more than a university qualified EC teacher

All educators who contributed stated that the level of responsibility and expectation placed on them daily is not remunerated adequately. Why is it that if you work with young children this is deemed an instinctive skill so you don't need to be paid at a respectable rate?

Melissa Keidge, Group Leader, Griffith University, Boronia Child Care Centre

I am currently working in the nursery with eight babies and I find it very difficult to have time to complete all the daily requirements that are needed to fulfil the programming requirements, (reflections, daily observations, programming checklist) just to name a few.

The day never runs smoothly for us to have a complete hour or two to complete just one of those tasks. And the government expects all centres to be above standard with programming and linking to theories etc., tell me when we have time to find theorists to link to all the observations- think 2 observations a child with 10 children to ensure they all have everything covered.

I really think we need another "walk in my shoes" campaign where a MP comes in and tries to settle children, complete programming, do all the above with interruptions every half hour with children waking up etc. would like to also ask that wages are increased too, the requirements that the government have brought out with the National Quality Framework and the ELYF have increased our programming requirements. If we are just classed as Babysitters why are the group leaders expected to have high standards on the programming requirements? How can it be high quality care in a nursery when the ratio is high and we have to get all the paperwork done daily?

Nita Buttimore, Group Leader, Griffith University, Boronia Child Care Centre

Being a woman in the year 2014 and working in the sector of Early Childhood Education and Care is unimaginably difficult. We are continuously paid low wages and we are poorly recognised in this sector as Professionals. I have worked in this sector for nearly two years and I look to my past thinking how on earth did I sink so low – a sector that does not see who I am and what I am worth because I am a woman. My future is bleak in this sector. I have a choice, my two options are to continue doing what I do or leave . The low wages that affect us. The poor recognition that affects us. The limited acknowledgement that the work we do is important affects us. The Qualifications that we have to attain affects us. I am loathe to look back in our history to see that today's women feel that they still have no voice in today's society. That is an issue! If there were more males/ men working in this sector – the wage award would not be a concern. That is an issue! If governments really believe that quality education is a commodity, that one size fits all. That is an issue!

If we can't do something about this crisis, centres will close and it seems inevitable that all those working in the childcare sector are about to be plummeted into an abyss of unemployment and families at an even greater loss in juggling child care needs and work.

I will wipe a tear, apply a band aid, hold a hand, cuddle, hold, I will push a swing, I will dig a hole in a sandpit, I will speak in whispers, I will light the candle on the birthday cake, I will listen, I will talk of faraway places, I will create a world of kindness, peace and love, I will bring joy to a heart, I will put a smile on a face, I will set the scene, I will captain a pirate ship, I will

pilot a space rocket, and step upon a moon, I will fly, I will swim among the dolphins, I will kick a ball higher than the trees. I do all this and the child knows who I am: I am his educator, his soother, his friend, his captain, his singer, his cuddle, his quiet voice, a child knows my worth. Why can't society and the government?

Ashleigh Wilson, Educator, Little Gems Early Learning Albany Creek

Our sector is a sector of many rewards. When educators effectively provide a program that is essential to a young child's learning, we get to see our children grow into productive members of society. We provide a service that requires time, patience, knowledge and a lot of love. Many of us sacrifice time with our loved ones to ensure that we are doing everything within our power to ensure that each child in our care is taken care of and educated to the highest of standards. Our sector is essential to the country.

A quality service provides organisation, consistency and continuity of care and education. Each educator has a duty of care to each child within the service and with that duty, provide the highest standard of care and education possible. A quality service provides the highest quality and qualified educators ensuring that they are in the sector for the right reasons. Quality services provide a program that is inclusive of all children and a routine that allows the child to have the best preparation for school.

The ability to provide professional wages would reflect the responsibility that each educator has every time they walk through the door. This is a responsibility to not only educate each child to the highest standard, but ensure that each child is safe and secure whilst in our care. Professional wages allows each service to attract and retain the highest of quality of educators, which in turn creates a high level of confidence and expectation from the parents. We have parents constantly telling us that "you don't get paid enough for what you do." Surely if parents recognise this fact, there is obviously an issue with the wages within the sector.

The NQF has increased the standards of education and provides a consistent standard for all children, families and educators. The NQF has granted us the ability to be seen as a profession which has unified the sector. All of this has ensured that not only are we accountable, but services are accountable as well. When running the NQF effectively, the paperwork is diminished and is more meaningful, rather than the old system where paperwork was a quota. More meaningful documentation ensures that the children's learning is guided in a positive and effective way rather than the sake of meeting numbers

A high staff turnover is detrimental to services. There is no consistency of care which it then diminishes the ability for the children to learn as they no longer feel safe and secure as the bonds created with their educators are severed. Children become distressed as there are changes and parents then become unhappy with the service questioning the quality of both the service and educators as they feel a high turnover equals an unstable service. High turnover sacrifices the quality of care and education and WPHS issues arise as ratios are out, educators are stressed because there is more children than they can safely educate or supervise.

Changes that can be made to the sector is ensuring that educators who enter the sector are qualified and have passed a substantial amount of practical work as well as theory so it is not a shock to the system when they arrive. There needs to be a higher recognition of responsibility in the form of professional wages and consultation with those who work within the sector. A person who does not work in the sector has no idea that your day can change in the blink of an eye with many factors that can't be controlled. Nobody knows what works well better than those of us who work within the sector.

Avis Kerr, Director, Nicholls Early Childhood Centre

I have worked with young children for 53 years and have found it the most rewarding career. Being an important part of a young child's life, working in collaboration with the families, and observing the growth and development of the children.

Over the years I have seen many changes within this profession, the most recent being the introduction of the NQF. This was such a huge step that recognised the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care. The regulations that will ensure a high standard of quality care for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Quality care can be achieved by having well trained EXPERIECED educators, who enjoy working with young children and are committed to providing a quality program.

Currently the training provided for people entering this profession is generally of a high standard, but that is only the beginning. Experience comes with time, and qualified educators need to work in the profession for many years to build up the experience required to be able to provide high quality care.

Attracting people to the profession is not difficult, I have not advertised for trainees for many years; I have many enquiries, from school leavers and older people and am able to select candidates from them.

With the current government incentives of free training and payment for offering traineeships, there is little cost to the centre to employ trainees. There is the bonus for centre as it provides additional staff that will eventually be able to fill any staff vacancies without the cost of advertising.

Maintaining a high level of quality educators is difficult as after the initial training, many leave the profession before reaching the level of experience needed to be a quality educator.

I have had staff leave as they can earn more money stacking shelves in supermarkets. They leave because they find that as a childcare professional they are undervalued, and underpaid for the important role they fill. I have lost three very experienced quality educators who found that it was not financially viable to return to the profession after having children of their own. Paying child care fees from a Child care person's salary did not leave enough money for mortgages etc. One educator got evening work in a local supermarket (her husband could look after their child at that time as he was then home from work). Another found work in the public

service (her training in Childcare gave her many skills that she was able to use in her new job) and now earns far more money than she previously earned as a room leader.

On losing experienced quality educators, many centres have to replace them with newly or partially trained people. This obviously reduces the level of quality care in the program. The children also suffer as they lose a loved carer and get confused at having to get to know someone new. It is well documented that continuity of carers is most desirable with young children.

A higher wage would recognise the importance of the role of the Early Childhood Educators, they would be less likely to seek other employment (using the skills they have already acquired), if they felt respected for their position and their wage was enough for the current cost of living.

The continual high level of staff turnover is costing the government a great deal of money as there is a constant stream of people taking up the training incentives, only to leave after a few years. Higher, professional wages would keep them in the profession and reduce the need for so many new trainings.

Childcare is an important part so Australia's economy. Many of the women in the workforce have young children and their need for childcare is paramount to their availability for work. Without these women many industries and professions would struggle to find adequate employees. If women are unable to return to the workforce after having children there would be a huge shortage of experienced people in many workplaces.

Most families use two incomes to afford mortgages, rents and general costs of living. This money going into the Australian economy boosts all related industries e.g. housing, groceries, retail, car manufacturing, travel etc. Childcare is vital to Australia's economy.

While I agree that the cost of childcare should be met by the users, i.e. the parents, there needs to be some extra funding to ensure that Childcare professionals receive a suitable wage. If this has to be funded solely from parent fees, the cost of childcare will be too high for most families, and the result would be either using cheaper, unregulated care, or not returning to work.

Community based (not for profit) childcare centres are generally cheaper than the private (for profit) centres; but these would need to increase their fees by a substantial amount, around \$30.00 per day, to be able to pay professional wages.

The NQF is working towards childcare employing Early Childhood Teachers in the staff ratio. While this is very desirable and would be of the utmost advantage to the education and care provided, this will place an extra burden on the salary budget.

To remove any of the standards that the NQF has set would be disadvantaging the children of Australia. It would seem that their wellbeing, development, education and care, is of little

importance. It has taken many years for the importance of these early years to be recognised, it must not be allowed to slip back. The NQF recognises the importance of the early years. The framework demands highly trained, skilled quality educators; a higher ratio of staff to children; educational programs that reflect the individual skills, interests and needs of the children; and educators that are trained and skilled in working collaboratively with the community and with families of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

All this for \$19.00 per hour? Quality costs. In order for centres to comply with the NQF we need to be able to retain the qualified, experienced educators. This is impossible without the offer of a wage that is of a professional level.

Zu Baines, Supervisor, Goodstart Kallangur East

Our profession is an essential service for today's families and the community. While this profession is a challenging one, it is most rewarding as well. Children, while in our care, learn not only life skills, they also learn the early academics needed before starting off in school. These life skills are so important for without them, a child starting school is on the back foot behind their other peers and many of the life skills necessary for school are so much harder to learn at an older age.

A quality service provides the best possible care for all children and families and ensures that all the children's needs are met and all children are included in the program provided. A high quality service takes into consideration the needs and inclusion of all cultural back grounds of all the children enrolled and provides a program of value to all. Quality and qualified educators are a necessity to the sector.

Professional wages ensure that we are able to attract and retain only the highest of quality educators and is essential in ensuring that the sector is meeting the needs of today's families. Professional wages allows educators to receive the professional recognition that they so rightly deserve and have been waiting for. A true professional can provide the most effective early learning program that will benefit all children while they are in care.

High staff turnover hinders the learning capabilities for children as the bonds that they create with educators is severed due to the need for the educator to move on. Parents lose confidence in the service as well as the sector and turnover creates a hardship on all within the service as we need to ensure that the learning continues and all safety standards are met, which can be near impossible when there is such a high turnover as quality is compromised.

The NQF ensures that services are of the highest standard nationally and all services are maintaining those standards. The NQF has allowed educators to provide a more meaningful and effective program which allows the best outcomes for the child. We have noticed that there is a reduction in paperwork which in turn has allowed for more quality time to be spent with each child helping them learn to the best of their capabilities. The NQF has allowed us to look at the child first and then work the learning out from there which will have a greater effect

on the economy and community later on down the track as we've helped develop these children to their highest potential.

Many things work well within the sector, but there are some things that also need to be changed. Consultation with educators within the sector is key, as who knows what works best then the professionals that provide the education and care? There needs to be a crackdown on short cuts to qualifications. Learning colleges need to ensure that only the truly qualified pass not just to make a quota or encouraging that ECEC is "easy." Life experience for mature age educators should count toward qualifications as some of the best only have their Cert 3, but make fantastic educational leaders with their life experience added to the mix. The ratio's need to be maintained or lessened as when ratios are higher, quality is sacrificed and the day becomes not a day of learning, but a day of survival. Two children added to a ratio, can make a huge negative difference to how the day turns out.

Trudi Reeve, Room Leader, Goodstart Early Learning Huntingdale

Working in ECEC is the most rewarding and enjoyable role I have undertaken. I left the sector for 2 years to work elsewhere, but have recently returned to the job I love most of all. The high turnover of staff is the main concern, as these precious children and their families are left in the lurch when staff, such as myself, decide we need to leave for financial reasons and find a higher paying role.

I work for an organisation that uses agency relief staff often, most days in fact, and I see how the change in educator impacts on the children. Three new educators in one week is hard for families to deal with. I find it difficult to work in, and maintain, a quality service while this practice continues, as the positive relationships formed are at the forefront of children's development in the early years. Higher wages will go a long way to ensure professional caring staff, such as myself, remain in the sector and give the continuity of care that our children and their families deserve.

My vision for ECEC is to see a situation where we have professionally paid, content staff members who remain at a workplace for years at a time, to form strong relationships with the families in the community and to provide a stable learning environment in those important early years.

Caitlin Deakes, Educational Leader/Manager, Griffith University, Tallowood and Boronia Child Care Centre

Having worked in the sector for over 23 years I am an advocate for quality care and education for our future generations. I applaud the implementation of the National Quality Framework- we need a curriculum that raises the standards and demands quality education and care for our children. I am the Educational Leader/Manager of two early childhood centres and we work incredibly hard each day to ensure that the children that enrol in our program are involved in a high quality program "where children come first." We are leaders in our sector continually

pushing ourselves professionally to ensure that we maintain this high level of service to the children and their families. But it comes at a price for us! We have been indirectly supporting the child care sector for too long. We can no longer sustain these types of wages just for the 'love of it.' I have contemplated leaving this sector for the last couple of years and continue to struggle with this decision every day. I can't afford to have the great Australian dream of owning my own home as I don't have enough money to put a deposit down. I struggle each week to put money aside to save for a good holiday not just to the sunshine coast or gold coast. I am burnt out and exhausted but still clock in and clock out each day giving 1000% to my sector and centres.

Things need to change, things must change. Educators are living on the edge, who supports the educators who have supported the children and families for years and years? Educators across the nation are sharing the same struggles, workloads and lack of recognition and respect that we demand and deserve.

I have been a voice for our most vulnerable (our children, the forgotten just like our educators) who don't have a voice and can't express how they feel about the programs that they attend. If only we could ask the children and listen to their thoughts. I'm sure these would be a few comments from our very young children:

- "It is emotionally draining for us to spend several months establishing good attachment relationships with the educators and then have them leave us."
- "I would like to spend more time with the educators but they have so much paperwork that they have to complete. Why am I not the priority?"
- "I am feeling sad and afraid and I just need a cuddle why can't someone give me a cuddle."
- "I need a sleep- why can't these educators pick up on my cues? (Untrained and uneducated educators)."

Wendy Craik (Presiding Commissioner) and Jonathan Coppel (Commissioner) you should now be starting to see some themes coming through about the disgusting wages and the type of pressure that our educators are going through on a daily basis. You should have some knowledge of the pay rates that our educators are being paid to indirectly support the cost of child care. Would you both be able to live on these types of wages? I can guarantee you that you are paid for your qualifications and years of experience. That is all we are asking. We want to be paid for our dedication and commitment to the early childhood which matches our training. Please listen to our educators, you have the power to change this injustice for so many. Be the voice for our children!

Melissa Bowers, Group Leader, Tallowood Childcare Centre

I started my career in child care back in 1988, as a child care assistant. I was appalled then at the low pay rate. But what was worse were the attitudes of the women who worked at the centre for years. These women teachers justified the low pay as a way to help women go to

work. If the child care teacher was paid more, then the working mother could not afford childcare so she would have to stay home. The 1980s were a time when media and women's groups pushed that a woman's worth was proved by getting a job outside of the home. Staying at home with your kids was viewed as society oppressing you as a woman. What was so ironic was many of these child care teachers were mothers themselves and willing to be paid a pittance to help indirectly support another mother's childcare costs. Sadly, twenty six years later things have not changed much. Our society does not view working with young children as teaching, no matter what credentials and training you have. You are viewed as a babysitter.

These comments/actions reiterate this, The Abbott government asking Australian childcare workers to "do the right thing" and hand back \$62.5 million given to them to improve their wages. Ms Ley (Assistant Education Minister) stating that the money would be better spent on educating childcare workers how to live on a low income and training them how to supervise more children at once. These comments are uneducated, draconian and demeaning and suggest that the government/society needs educating.

The early childhood years are the period of the greatest and most significant developments in a person's life and are generally regarded as the foundation upon which the rest of their life is constructed. Furthermore, an expanding body of research literature from fields as diverse as neuroscience, health and economics indicates that early investments in human capital offer significant returns both to individuals and to the wider community. Yet the early years are those that traditionally have received the least attention from the education world. I am lucky I work in a centre that has an amazing and well educated director. This is a rarity in the sector. A lot of them just fumble their way through the day putting staff and children at risk because of their own lack of intelligence, experience/management skills and knowledge of the sector. Registered training organisations such as Good Start need to be investigated (using a Holistic approach) as their training is inadequate to cope with the changes in the sector.

The ECT issue is the hardest to address, the government is pushing these educators into a system that is very different from a school and their training, many of them are floundering and need the support of experienced educators (who were already doing this role) to help them do their job. This is a very expensive experiment and when did learning only commence at kindergarten, what about before then? As educators we know that the first three years of life is a period of incredible growth in all areas of a baby's development, hence the need/importance/enabler of quality pedagogy; Small group sizes.

So when government/society talks about demanding equal pay for women, and finding affordable childcare so that women can work, they tend to discount the fact that most early childhood educators are also women, many of whom are asked to accept a pittance in order to accommodate other women who have "real" jobs. This is exploitation.

Megan Kennedy-Clark, Manager, Southport Children's Educational Centre

As an educator within this profession for the last 22 years I support the quality initiatives of our government to improve the standard within early education and care environments. I believe that it is only with continued review of our practices that we can continue to improve outcomes for children. But how can we achieve the best outcomes for children? I believe that the basis of quality outcomes for children begins with the educators who work within this profession. It is us, the educators who ensure the health, safety, education and well-being of the children in our care.

I first joined this profession as a 17 year old who was determined to make a difference to the children of Australia. I have remained as an educator in this profession because I believe that I do make a difference to the children of Australia on a daily basis. But believe me, this is not an easy task!

Each week I am paid for 38 hours work, but each week I work in excess of 44 hours within the service (at least 6 hours per week unpaid) and I am not the only educator to do this. Then there is the hours of paperwork we take home each week. Now sure we could skim by with the bare minimum requirements but that isn't providing quality outcomes for children. I, and the other educators within my service and my colleagues within other services put all of this extra time in because we want to make a difference to the children in our care. I find it so disheartening when I hear of another colleague who is leaving our profession due to the low status or poor pay and this happens on a regular basis. M just left to study architecture and S just left to work in a restaurant. I hate it when I meet you people and they ask what I do. I reply that I am an educator in the early education and care profession - they look at me blindly and so then I say I am in child care and their usual response is "Oh you look after kids" or "Oh so you get to play with kids all day." This makes me so mad - I do so much more than that! I am responsible for educating the next generation. I care for and educate children, I know these children so well, I know when they are unwell or when they are happy or sad, I spend my weekends thinking about an activity that can help Johnny be more accepted by the others or to bring Sarah out of her shell, to encourage Max's creativity or Julie's ability to share. I am a counsellor for their parents, I identify children at risk, and I support families to seek additional help for their children if required. Please tell me why people just think I play all day. Each activity and experience within our day is purposeful and is designed to help children achieve better outcomes and to reach their potential.

Did you know that by spending \$1000 of my own money, and a year of my own time after work to study the Advanced Diploma in Children's Services that I am not entitled to a pay rise? What other profession rewards their employees for further study with simply a pat on the back? Did you know that a Bachelor trained teacher in the early education profession earns at least \$10,000 less than a Bachelor trained teacher in the school system not to mention the difference in hours and school holidays.

As educators we make the most valuable contribution to Australian society - we are educating Australia's future. It is accepted that the first 5 years of a child's life are the most important so why are those that educate and care for children during this time so undervalued? If you want to achieve better outcomes for children and a quality early education and care environment within Australia it is essential that the educators who provide this service are considered. My 16 year old daughter is currently planning her final years of schooling and her career to follow. She told me she wanted to work in the early years just like me. I was so proud but sadly I told her to study primary teaching and go into the school system. I know that she would be a wonderful educator and our profession would be lucky to have her, but as a mother I want better for her. That is sad to say of the profession I love. I hope that by reading this you want better for our profession than what we have now. I humbly request that you consider the valuable role that educators play in ensuring that Australia remains a productive and strong country. Without quality services for children, families are unable to work and quality services only come from the motivated and inspired educators who care for and educate thousands of Australian children each and every day. Thank you.

Chicquita Torrielle, Director, Yuingi Multicultural Child Care Centre

I have 28 years' experience working in all aspects of the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. During this time I have experienced an sector that is quite hectic and busy with different challengers every day. I have seen many families through this stage in their child's life and I am so proud to have had this as my career. During this experience I have come to have an appreciation for what is quality and what that looks like in the practical running of long day care centres. The centre I have enjoyed working at for the last 9 years is one that I am proud to say reaches extremely high levels of quality. At my centre we have a supportive inclusive company that strives for continual improvement in quality. Without this support I feel quality would be lacking and I see many of my fellow educators in other centres struggle to achieve the level of quality that they would like due to unsupportive management or owners that have to focus on achieving profit over quality.

One of my colleagues left the company in May last year only to return this year after experiencing two other centres during that time that did not have quality at hart. Our parents that use this centre have a great appreciation for the cost that is involved in achieving quality and as many parents are already paying high fees we rely largely on fund raising and donations to assist in achieving this quality. The biggest challenge facing the sector and the educators that this sector rely on is the low level of pay these qualified professionals receive. Many educators just can't afford to continue in this career due to such low appreciation for what they do and the responsibility they hold each and every day. The introduction of the Early Years Quality Fund was the beginning of a process to professionally recognise educators. Staff are incredibly disappointed to see the EYQF not distributed as it was designed to. Now educators are left thinking when will the government realise their responsibility to the ECEC sector and the workers that keep the sector going?

Due to this sector being primarily a female dominated workforce, one of the toughest challenges I see as a director is accommodating maternity leave of staff. Although this centre has seen very little staff turnover, this year we have two staff beginning maternity leave within a month of each other. Replacing these staff with equally qualified workers could prove to be a challenge as there is so many qualified educators leaving the sector due to the low pay received after completing qualifications. Encouraging staff to return to work following their maternity leave is also a challenge with the low wages. I have seen many dedicated educators decide not to return to work as their pay barely covers the cost of their own child attending day-care.

During the January 2011 Brisbane floods it was highlighted to our centres community just how important our service and management is. Our centre was flooded and closed down for 3 months. This left 17 staff and 115 families in turmoil. If not for the dedication to quality shown by our management those 17 staff would have been without work or income for their own families. We saw many families primarily those with children under 3 years without placements for care. This meant that these families had to take extended leave or for some cease work altogether. Luckily this disturbance to our service was temporary yet it gets me thinking of what the effects could be if the ECEC sector doesn't see some change soon.

Without staff achieving quality there is no service for families to rely on. Investing in quality educators is an investment in ECEC which is an investment in our countries economy.

Kimberley Murphy, Group Leader, Jacaranda Underwood

I have had ten years' experience working as a qualified educator. This is the only career I have ever had or wanted. I actively pursued this career with a passion and dedication for educating the developing minds of children under 5 years. This choice has come with incredible challenges both professional and personal that has only deepened my determination to continue in this career striving for best practice as I further my studies with a bachelor in early childhood education .

It is now in the hundreds of children and families I have seen during their journey through early education in various centre settings and I can honestly say that these journeys have not been as positive and productive as I would have otherwise like to seen due to a sector that is in crisis. An under staffed, under resourced, under recognised and undervalued sector relying solely on the patience and resilience of what is a mostly female dominated workforce expected to struggle through purely for 'the love' of the job.

Through many interactions with parents and fellow educators I have come to appreciate a perception of what constitutes a quality early education. When parents see their child develop a knowledge base and skill set from their attendance, children that are confident and comfortable within their development with an eagerness to express individuality and contentment. Quality is not one set of rules or standards it is the respect that all children,

families, communities or centres are different with unique needs that must be fully funded in achieving the highest level of quality.

In striving for this level of quality we must first address the crisis facing the sector's most valuable commodity without which this sector would not be, Educators. A centre can have all the best toys or playground money can buy but without a stable and qualified staff quality early education is impossible to achieve. To show respect and recognition of just how important educators are there must be appropriate remuneration that is currently lacking. A professional wage would mean acknowledgement of the commitment to achieving quality. Professional wages would mean I would not have to sacrifice owning a home to do the career I am passionate about. Professional wages would mean quality for children and families using the services.

The extreme staff turnover facing the sector is of particular concern to me when I think of quality early education being provided. I have seen a single child have six different Educators during a six month period. This lack in continuity is incredibly detrimental to a child's education and development. As many recent studies show the negative effects with attachment for the child can have lifelong implications.

As I have already highlighted, educators are the fundament element to quality early education. So how can we accept losing so many? To have a productive early education sector this crisis needs to be addressed and as the majority of Educators leave because of poor working conditions due to low paid workers, a professional wage seems a simple and necessary step to take.

If wages were to be improved then the staff to child ratio could be improved. Retaining staff and attracting workers to the sector with fair pay would mean that children could gain the attention needed to reach a quality early education. Never should a child have to sacrifice much needed attention from its Educator because there is not enough hands to go round. I appreciate that the cost of staff on employers/families is high however the effects of simply ignoring the need for more staff for the sake of meeting a budget is unimaginable when you see a child in need going without. I have to see this every day and is a huge burden on myself and colleagues. I call on this commission to address these concerns in their findings with appreciation for what is in the children's best interest not the interests of meeting a budget. Having a quality, stable and reliable workforce would mean a quality, stable and reliable sector for all of Australia to thrive on.

Angela Tardiani, Group Leader, Griffith University, Tallowood CCC

This is my 23rd year in this sector and I have had enough of being treated as a babysitter from the government, the department and the families.

I completed my Diploma 23 years ago and it took me two full years to do this, as well as 280 hours of practical training. I had to work hard for this and studied hard to complete my

modules. Now you can complete your Diploma in six or seven months. These staff come out with no understanding of child development and are in charge of a room and our precious children.

Currently in our sector we are employing staff whose second language is English and who barely understand basic instructions. We have to supervise them as well as the children to make sure the children are safe. This adds to my stress levels and work load. They don't understand child development and only want to clean which does not represent the important work that we do.

I support the National Quality Framework but if we are getting paid as babysitters why do we have to do so much paperwork. I am currently working with babies and I have spent the last couple of weeks forming attachment bonds with them but I am so stressed I can't get my paperwork done. Sometimes I have to take it home to complete. The nursery is the only room that you do not get a break during the day to breathe and get the paperwork done. Other rooms have the opportunity at sleep time to catch up and get things done. It is such a stressful room. How can this be quality when our ratio is 8:2? Please I beg you to change the ratio to 6 for the sake of our babies, the next generation.

Possible changes that are vital:

- Wages, wages, wages. I live from week to week on my wage and cannot save enough money to buy a house. I will rent for my entire life if I stay in this sector. We are ignored by politicians and we get told to do our job. Live on our wages for a week and you would support this wage claim.
- Better training and educated staff coming in our sector.
- Recognition and respect.

Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre

I asked families to provide comments on the following questions.

Q1. Why are you using an ECEC service?

Of the families who responded all said:

A). It was due to their need to work and maintain their own sense of wellbeing; personal professional development and be productive members of Australia's economic community.

B. The importance of their children gaining opportunity to develop holistically.

C. To provide opportunities they are not able to or are capable of.

D. For support: particularly if there is no extended family around for support; the centre becomes the 'extended family'.

Q2. What is important to you in an early childhood setting?

1. Quality of educators and their ability to provide a learning play environment where their children feel happy and content.
2. Facilities that are organised; clean and look inviting.
3. Affordability was mentioned by some of our respondents particularly for single parents and those on lower incomes.
4. Some parents commented on not wanting to compromise on quality for the sake of affordability.
5. Trust is paramount when leaving their most precious asset - their children, in a centre. It is totally reassuring knowing their children are in good hands.
6. Prospective families touring the centre ask if all educators working here are qualified and are relieved that this criteria is met. This is a positive option for them.
7. Professional wages: Valuing what an educator does for our children is worth being remunerated appropriately for.
8. NQF: For some parents this is new language for them. They are informed that this sets benchmarks for services to aspire to. Based on the comments above families want quality services for their child. This is where trust and reassurance becomes part of the partnership between a family and the centre.

Vivien Eddy, Director, Goodstart Early Learning

As a Centre Director, I can see how the child care and education sector both caters for families and children and also works against them. It is clear to me that this is also the situation for educators. In the nearly six years I have been at my current centre, I can clearly see the shift in how the NQF has changed the role of educators. The idea that we are now to be seen as Educators instead of babysitters has many different sides. I wholeheartedly agree that we are educators and that we do educate children every minute they are in our care, but we were also doing this before the NQF came in. Admittedly, we weren't required to teach babies and toddlers about sustainability and expect our educators to not only teach, care and love children, but to maintain full gardens of vegetables and look after chickens, worms and guinea pigs.

Many of the educators in my centre spend their weekends with second jobs and babysitting jobs just to make ends meet. This means they are not getting enough rest and free time to recuperate enough to be ready to educate a room full of children.

I also have several educators in my service who are studying in their spare time. Some are studying toward different career paths that will be more profitable and help sustain their goals

for the future. Three of my educators are studying their Bachelor of Education and plan to leave our centre to become teachers in schools as soon as they finish their degrees. These educators do not wish to stay in LDC to teach the Kindergarten Program due to the long hours and terrible pay conditions. In the last 4 months, we have had 2 wonderful educators leave our sector as they see that they cannot afford to get a loan for a house on their current wages. Our workforce is constantly in a cycle of change - people come to our sector when they are young, then when they start getting married and wanting to buy houses and have children they leave our sector for better paid jobs. Some do return later in life when money is less of a concern and they know how much they love to work in the sector. This cycle does not work well for the continuity of care for families and children and also costs sector a fortune in hiring, induction and retraining of new educators.

I am unsure where we will find any extra educators to work if the government decides that all centres should be open extra hours and be more flexible to families. We struggle to have educators to fill our current ratios on some days and many centre directors spend hours a day working in rooms to make up the gaps. This means that we are not able to run the centre to the best of our ability (and to meet all of the NQF requirements) and I often come to work on a weekend to complete work that I was unable to finish throughout the working week. I think the government needs to look at how we can attract the right people to the sector - not just people that think that looking after children is an easy way to fill in time until they get a 'real' job. The most obvious way to do that is to lift the financial incentives by assisting centres to pay their educators a decent wage. This pay rise cannot come from the families by raising fees as many families are already at breaking point. In the current system, I have heard many families comment that sometimes they wonder why they bother working because at the end of the week they may only be \$20-\$50 better off. Yet, they are sacrificing so much to go back to work - time with their families and watching their children grow up. Last week I had a family leave (whose child was heading to school) who had been with us for five years. They were so thankful to myself and the other educators and made the comment that over these years we had spent as much time, or even more time, with their child than what they have.

As the Centre Director, I also see major flaws in how the government manages the CCB and CCR entitlements for families. I have had families in my centre that have been behind on fees, yet they still get the Child Care Rebate. In my opinion, the CCR should be paid directly to the centre so that the fees are more manageable for families. I also think that setting the CCB for only 50 hours for most working families is also penalising families for working full time. Many companies are not flexible enough to allow parents, especially women, to job share or work less than a standard working week. I think this needs to change. I see the value in having a better work/life balance by having one parent, usually the mother, working two to three days a week. This would also allow more mothers to enter the workforce. Many families also face the problem which I think of as the chicken/egg problem. Families can't afford to pay for childcare when only one parent is working and the other parent is looking for work, yet if they then find a job they may not be able to secure a place in a quality centre. Therefore, families may be

paying for places they don't need or can't really afford, or they turn back a job offer because they can't find care. It really is a terrible situation for parents.

In relation to the inclusion of children with special needs, I believe there needs to be more help available for children and families and service providers before the child is diagnosed and during this whole process. We often see children who we think may need additional assistance, but families are waiting for six to twelve months to see a paediatrician to assist with assessment and possible diagnosis. During this time, it puts a major stress on families and care providers, and is definitely not in the best interests of the child.

In closing, I feel that there is a lot that can be done to improve the whole child care sector. I do believe that a lot of the focus needs to be on ensuring that we keep our great educators and stop the constant flow of people leaving the sector due to terrible wages. People can only afford to live week to week on these wages, they cannot afford to move up and forward in their lives and get into the housing market or have decent savings or superannuation contributions. Love for this job is just not enough. I would like to see any of the nation's politicians living on \$20 per hour and still being able to make ends meet, and then being told that they shouldn't complain that they should just do it for the love of it.

Nancy Anne Patterson, Early Childhood teacher, Griffith University Boronia Childcare Centre

My name is Nancy Anne Patterson, four years qualified registered teacher with Griffith University Boronia Child Care Centre. I have been in this sector with 20 years' experience – three years in Family day care, five years in after school hours' care and 12 years in long day care.

Why do I stay in this sector? I chose early childhood because of my background working in long day care as a group leader with Diploma of Childcare and Education, three years qualified. To upgrade my qualifications I went to university and did 4 years bachelor's degree in education with QUT. At university, we were given choices in what majors to take, early childhood, middle years or secondary. I love working with the younger children and so I majored in early childhood.

The university told us that this will give us a broad range of ages we can teach from Kindergarten to Year 3 levels. We were also told that as kindergarten teachers, we will have equal pay similar to teachers in the primary schools because we have the same four years bachelor of education qualifications.

Little did that we know that this was a big lie. I cannot understand why the government requires qualified teachers to teach kindergarten when to start with, they don't equalise our pay with primary school teachers.

The government wanted Queensland to keep in par with other territorial states as Queensland was very much behind other states. So they wanted to put qualified teachers to teach

Kindergarten like Preparatory year. They wanted Kindergarten children to be ready for school before their entry at Preparatory Year in the primary school.

With the new Australian curriculum across Australia that was implemented 2011, the preparatory year students are doing like the previous Year 1 levels; hence, the Year 1 level standard in Queensland will be in equal level with the other states. This is the big vision of the Queensland government so we are not left behind with the rest of the country. This is also the reason why the government required qualified teachers to teach at all Kindergarten to erase that people's mentality that childcare is only to look after children. Kindergarten teachers not only have the big job of teaching young children to be school ready for PREP; but we also have to care for these children til 6:00pm until working parents pick them late at night. Most of these children are in long day care centres from 7:30 am to 6:00pm five days a week. As kindergarten teachers, we should not only be paid to teach but also to care for them. Baby sitters and/or nanny get paid \$24.00 an hour to look after their children when parents want to go out at night or care during the day.

In realisation, most of the kindergarten teachers receive very low pay of \$24.00 per hour or less in their first year of teaching depending what childcare centre are offering; in comparison with first year primary school teachers receive \$40.00 per hour, plus 12 weeks holiday throughout the year. Whereas, long day care teachers only get 4 weeks of holiday per year. Furthermore, there is not much difference in pay between the group leaders and kindergarten teachers which is about \$1.00 an hour considering teachers are 4 years qualified and went to university for their training to teach children.

Not to mention the work load that Kindergarten teachers has to do to implement the Queensland kindergarten learning guidelines and Early Years Learning Framework curriculum. As a kindergarten teacher, I have to do paper work for 32 children and comply with NQF. We only have five hours a week the most for programming to write our observations of children's learning. Most of the time, I take home paper work and do another extra six hours during the week and week end to keep up what is required for what we have to do for documentation of children's learning. With all this extra hours of unpaid work, makes me question myself what am I here for? My answer is that I am passionate and dedicated to my teaching and making a difference to the lives of the young children that I teach. All Kindergarten teachers are different and like individuals have different pedagogy. I wanted to leave a footprint in their lives that when they grow up they will always remember what my kindergarten teacher taught me at childcare.

I don't think the Government has the right idea about reallocating our Early Years Quality Fund to training. I have four years university training, what more training do you want me to do or other kindergarten teachers have to do more training for what? Are you going to train all kindergarten teachers to become 'Directors or managers of child care centres, when in fact there are a lot of childcare directors do not hold Bachelor's degree. Most centres have one director and about 15 staff working under the director.

Now with this 'new training scheme', will more training mean that we can all become directors where you are putting the funding instead of increasing our pay? We only need one director and 15 dedicated educators in our centre. The training the government envisages would not put more food on our table, put clothing for our family or send our children to school.

All the training in the world will not improve your life style or attitude in childcare unless you receive a pay rise; each year to keep you in line with the CPI index. My challenge to you Mr Abbot and your other political colleagues, would you be happy to have a pay increase of \$3.00 per hour like we in the childcare sector are fighting for. The Abbott government is a disgrace to say the least, it has shown its ugly arrogant attitude in more ways than one, and child care which is a much needed sector in Australia to provide service for the working families. When Abbot was put in to lead the country, one of your platforms was for 'Better Education'; but how can you have better education for young children when you cannot give an equal pay of kindergarten teachers and other educators to care and educate for the young children. Studies have shown that the first five years of children's learning is most vital before they go to school. Therefore, childcare educators should be paid accordingly for the work that they provide for the young.

Melissah, Educator, Little People's Place East Fremantle

I have recently made the change to child care from working as a personal trainer. I chose to change industries because I enjoy working with children and feel fulfilled by knowing that I am helping young children. I wish that the pay was higher as it is hard to pay a mortgage and all the other bills as well as be able to buy food and going out with my friends and family. I am finding that I cannot do as much as I should because I have to keep an eye on how much money I have and sometimes sacrifice seeing friends just to be able to save some money. We have one the most important jobs through educating the young children and ensuring that they have a good start to life. Parents and people in the community need to understand the importance that children going to child care plays in their children's life and be encouraged to support their children going to child care to help start their child's education on the right path. If there is not a change I will have to consider changing industries even though I enjoy working with children. I will have to find another way to work with children where I also get a better pay.

Michelle Cook, Educator, Little People's Place East Fremantle

I have been working in the sector for seven years and I am passionate about my job and love working with children, they are wonderful and so funny. Everyone works so hard to make sure that they are happy and enjoying their day. I wish the pay was higher as I am trying to start a family and I know I will struggle with the income to have a family and afford to have a life plus pay for day care too. Dinner on the table, car repairs and health cover, it's all costs. That makes my current budget tight. I would like more recognition from everyone and to be equal. We are looked down upon considering we are looking after people's pride possessions! There needs to be more information available to families about day-care and why we are available. Families struggle to pay their fees so they leave and our numbers drop so I have to cut staff hours back.

They end up leaving and we have a higher staff turnover and parents don't like it. I hope that there is a change or I will have to leave the sector and get another profession with a higher pay.

Rebecca Henderson, Educator, Little People's Place East Fremantle

I address you as the mother of four grown children, a professional nanny to 27 children over a 30 year period and a child care educator currently updating my qualifications to the new national standards. (I have one month left of the diploma course).

In my forties I took a hiatus from child care to study for and gain a bachelor's degree in counselling which led to a career in adolescent and family system counselling. Over and over again in my therapeutic practice I would find myself exploring early years development and realised that the passion I thought had faded had simply suffered a temporary burn out. The experiences of raising my own children to adulthood and the counselling of parents in confidence strategies with their children informs my work with the childcare field as I can support not just the children but their parents. This is, in my opinion, a crucial part of my job. The skills, experience and commitment I bring to child care are not reflected in my wages and conditions. I can confidently and proudly state that my curriculum work is of the same standard as my contemporaries who teach kindergarten and pre-primary classes in the school system. Yes I have no non-contact time, do all my own room cleaning, provide guidance and support for parents, start early and finish late (unpaid) and all on a barely basic wage. This is more than a simple job, it's my vocation and my parents know I give my very best to their children. Is that not worth enough remuneration to allow me to rent a real home instead of living in my campervan?

Sooganthene Nalliah, Educator, Little People's Place East Fremantle

I have been working in the early childhood sector for ten years now. I've worked in a childcare centre in Singapore for 8 years and 2 in a local one. I love working with children and enjoy planning fun and meaningful activities for them. I do like the challenges posted to me by the vast number of characters and attributes each child possess and I believe my passion for children especially in their early years has kept me going this long in the sector. I pursued my degree in early childhood as I had a keen interest in the field and I believe it has been an asset to my career as it has helped me to understand the EYLF and the children better. I am pleased with the child care sector here as it is well planned and organised, namely the policies and procedures which are clear and concise. However there are a few points that may be considered for the benefit of educators in this field. The first one to be considered would be the wage. The educators have got a huge responsibility in caring for the children in the most essential years of their lives. Educators have trained and equipped themselves for the task, however the wage doesn't justify the amount of work they need to do. A higher wage may motivate more educators to stay in the sector and bring down turnover rates. The second would be to consider the job scope of an educator. The educators have got a numerous number of duties and there are some that can be taken off them, e.g. cleaning, washing,

mopping and sweeping etc. these jobs take precious time off the kids. The educators can be spending quality time with the children working on important skills/activities instead. The third would be non-contact time: to prepare /catch up on paperwork, curriculum planning, preparing for special events and excursions. It doesn't have to be on a daily basis and educators may take turns.

Annmarie Debono, Educator, Big Steps Western Australian Convening Group Team Leaders

This is a group submission. Early childhood educators in the early childhood education and care sector (ECEC) have worked hard to meet the needs of Children and Families. At the same time the interests and needs of our colleagues and staff at our services has always been important we recognise the need for Family/Work life balance for both our fellow Educators and our families. The provision of both is challenging and with shortages of Educators in the sector along with low wages. It becomes imperative to motivate and continually find ways to retain Educators.

As educators we believe in providing the best care and learning outcomes for the children who attend our services. Underpinning the provision of this has seen centre staff undertaking further learning to support the National Quality Framework (NQF) and The Early Years Learning Framework. (EYLF) At the same time we work closely in partnership with our families responsive to their emerging and changing needs

This response to the Productivity Commission on Early Childhood Education and Care reflects the values, beliefs and practices of the members of the Western Australian Convening Group for Big Steps. Any discussion of the future for ECEC and optimising children's learning and development requires us to look at Educator to child ratios, qualifications of educators, continuity of care, impact of EYLF and NQF and the professional wages.

We believe that the current Educator to child Ratio's at all services should be maintained nationally at the Western Australian Standard. That is to state in the 0-2's years 1:4, 2-3's 1-5 and 3-5's 1-10. At this level staff can develop and maintain responsive social relationships with our children which are cornerstones to children's development and learning. Research supports the significance of the relationship between Educators and children as our educators scaffold children's learning. However this also requires continuity of care for our children.

In our services shortages of staff in our sector coupled with the increasing requirements of the NQF and EYLF has seen Educators view ECEC as unattractive and in many services staff turnover has been high.

Educator's paperwork has continued to increase with educators undertaking professional development while professional wages have not rewarded their efforts. Many in the sector work tirelessly outside of their allotted "Planning time" demonstrating their commitment to

families and children. Educators in our sector need professional remuneration if we wish to maintain their momentum commitment and dedication.

We support the review of measures to ensure childcare is affordable, flexible and accessible for our families. However supporting the requirement of the NQF and the EYLF has seen our centres invest in staff training, provide additional planning time for our educators, and further develop resources for our centres. Staff turnover also compounds costs for our services.

At our services we offer flexibility of care occasional care, daily, part time and fulltime.

In an ideal world we would like to offer extended hours to meet those of shift workers and other parent's needs. This is problematic when we have staff shortages with the hours services currently operate and who will pay the additional hours. It raises questions as to what wages will be paid to staff who work these hours. Would they receive penalty rates outside of the services normal operating hours? Would CCB be paid for longer hours of attendance? Surely this too could impact on the affordability of ECEC for Parents. What about the work/family balance for our educators. All parties' needs are important if we wish to provide high quality care. Flexibility of care for our parents and families requires employers to be more flexible with work patterns to support women's participation in the workforce. It is challenging for many parents to balance dual roles of parent and employee in instances where they may have their children in two places at the same time, In an ECEC service and school.

We support further learning with recognition of prior learning for educators as they work towards their higher qualifications. We wish to retain Certificate III as entry level into our sector. The sector and the requirements of the Early Years Framework require all educators to contribute to the planning observing and implementation of learning environments and experiences for children. A sound knowledge base lays the foundation for all Educators to deliver high quality care and learning for all our children and their families.

Further professional development needs to be supported with recognition of prior learning for Educators in ECEC services to gain their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and Care. This in turn would fulfil the requirement for teachers in our services as current familiar skilled staff could fulfil the role. These educators understand fully the expectations of the services and sector and would ensure continuity of care.

The availability of ECEC has seen further options being explored to meet parents' needs. We recognise the rights of parents to have choice and available care. However this needs to be informed and ECEC options need to be regulated under both the National Quality Framework and The Early Years Learning Framework. We believe all children have the right to high quality care, with skilled responsive educators who work in partnerships with families. We also believe in the delivery of high quality training to prospective educators. We disapprove of the flick and tick approach that many registered training organisations have adapted. As the WA convening group we hope that this Productivity Commission enquiry will provide better outcomes for children their families and the ECEC workforce.

Kristy Heit, Educator, Centre withheld

I have worked in the childcare sector for just over 14 years and in this time I have been lucky enough to have worked in one centre in all different roles from assistant and to director. Not like a lot of other educators in this sector. I started out at my service as a student completing my work placement for my TAFE course. I was then offered as fulltime position as a group leader. I then continued this role in the centre for 8 years and was then offered the position of assistant director. After another five years I found myself as director. I work as a contact director working in the room two days a week and in the office the other days for the last two years. This is a very challenging role but I love it. After the national quality standards and the early years learning framework were introduced the childcare sector was finally been given the opportunity to be viewed as a professional sector to work in. However as we have moved through this change with obvious ups and downs we now come to a brick wall where we are not being recognised as professional early childhood educators. In my opinion the number one issue that needs to be addressed is the importance of quality care for all children over money and politics. Quality to me looks like low ratios for children to have more one on one time, qualified staff that are passionate about the importance of early years learning and consistency for children and families so they feel safe and secure at their home away from home. This quality of care can only be achieved if educators are recognised for their hard work and dedication to the job and what says this better than fair wages. Through professional wages educators can afford to stay in the job that they love and continue caring for the future generations. Fair wages offer educators the recognition they deserve. This is only a small argument of what I believe, but above all changes need to be made and who knows the sector better than the dedicated educators who work in it. Please listen to what we have to say.

Rae Young, Director, Children's Hospital Child Care Centre

I have worked in the Child Care sector for 30 years as a Director in the community sector. I am mindful of the enormous responsibility we have to families in caring for their children and for the wellbeing and education of young children at this critical stage of their development. The quality of care and education we are able to provide to children, is directly linked to the quality of the staff we can attract and retain as the critical component is the development of trusting relationships with children and parents. This requires continuity with a stable team of qualified early childhood care and education professionals.

Implementation of improvements including the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards have been advantageous in standardising the sector. The expectations of these have put a strain on the sector, because we are not paid accordingly, earning as little as \$18-\$21 per hour.

I believe there is still a wide range of quality standards throughout the sector, despite the attempts to standardise. This is primarily due to the difficulties in managing staff turnover. Despite their commitment to the children and the sector, many of our highly skilled and experienced educators leave the sector due to the low wages. Whilst child care educators can

earn more in an unskilled occupation, without the demands and responsibility of caring for very young children, we will continue to lose staff as they too have the right to earn a reasonable wage. The cost to the service of this turnover is huge, with much valuable time spent recruiting, continually orientating and training staff. This is time that would be better spent on caring and educating children and working on maintaining high quality standards. The cost to the children is that they continually have their trusting relationships interrupted and for families they have the uncertainty of knowing who is actually caring for their child, which does not equate to quality. Much of the community continue to see child care as 'babysitting' requiring a workforce with little education and skill. This is clearly no longer the case and the educational requirements and skills required to implement the EYLF and NQS requires a competent level of literacy and numeracy. Whilst we continue to de value child care by paying such poor wages, we will not attract the well-educated, professional individuals who will commit to the care and education of our young children.

Government support to parents is generous with the CCB and CCR. Quality improvement changes are addressing the need to standardise the quality. Now it is time to address the inequality of the remuneration to our educators if we want to offer high quality care and education to Australia's young children.

Margaret Carey, Director, Clovelly Child Care Centre

I have worked in the Early Childhood sector for over 20 years. During this time I have also had three children and had to use child care to continue to work. The irony of that situation was that after two children I could not afford to pay child care and this is a situation that still exists today. The majority of people who work in this sector, all of whom now have at a minimum a Certificate III, are low income earners and, depending on individual circumstances are unable to afford the very service they provide.

The private sector in particular, strives to keep wages low with the result that the childcare workers are in effect subsidising parent's fees. The state of play sets up early childhood educators being seen as greedy for simply wishing to be paid fairly. All education systems in Australia are funded by government so why not early childhood education? I can't understand why we don't fund the early childhood sector why we can't unify the separate services in the sector and why we can't pay decent wages within the sector?

From a director's perspective, the low wages mean that high quality workers are hard to keep. They quickly become disillusioned with the poor pay rates accompanied by high performance expectations. The sector definitely needs support in a new way. Our centre has a waiting list of over 500, most of which will never get offered a place. The list is so long because we are recognised as providing a quality service that has at its heart the best interests of the children. We try to recognise professionalism on a financial level but are restricted by our wish to keep our fees low. We need a new funding model and once that is accomplished we could address better the notions of accessibility, affordability and flexibility. However those concepts are impossible to change within the current context.

Fiona Box, Room Leader, Goodstart Boronia Heights Middle Road

I began my career in the sector in 2000 after leaving school, I enrolled in my Diploma of Childrens Services and was eager to begin my new career with no experience and very little knowledge of how complex this job can be. I chose to become an early childhood educator to help young children to care for, educate and watch them grow into independent people. I have always had a heart for children and wanted to help them to achieve their fullest potential.

Working in early childhood education and care can sometimes be the most rewarding job when you see a child learn something new or achieve a new level of understanding, you can then see a child looking at you with pride and determination in their eyes. It can also be a thankless job, putting in unpaid hours to complete tasks you may not have finished during the day. We are not just educators we are counsellors to parents when they are not quite sure what to do next, we clean our services to make sure it is a safe and healthy environment for the children to learn in. We have so many roles that are more than just education.

The first five years of a child's life are the most important when it comes to education as they will learn more in those five years than they will ever learn. We as educators help children to learn the basic building blocks that set them up for all their further education. In my years working in ECEC it has been wonderful to see the focus come off lots of paperwork and focus more on quality time and education of the children. For us to maintain high quality education and care we need to have high quality educators. Over the years I have seen many great educators leave the sector to become teachers in schools or change career completely so they can earn more money. Having a wage that reflects that we are educators not babysitters will help to keep quality educators in our services and also gives parents reassurance that their child will have a continuing education.

The National Quality Framework has been a great change for our sector, it has given all educators a chance to focus on quality not quantity. It has seen educators grow to their fullest potential and use their strengths to educate children thus bringing a better quality of education to early childhood. ECEC can only improve if we can keep quality outcomes and quality educators. A wage that reflects we are Educators, how are we going to continue to provide quality care and education on \$19 an hour with some educators working a second job just to provide for their own families.

Linda Pratt, Early Childhood Teacher, Eager Bees Early Learning Centre

I am a registered teacher (primary) with an early childhood major, who has worked in the early childhood sector for approximately 18 years. I also hold a Diploma of Community Services (Childrens Services). I have worked in all positions in the ECEC sector from assistant, group leader, teacher, director and licensee of a childcare centre. The ECEC sector is a great career choice as it offers a lot of personal satisfaction, as children advance with their learning. I find that I am learning new things daily from the children in my care and from their families. I am passionate about my job and the importance that it carries. I believe that with better education

in the early years, children will reach their potential, have a better chance at life in the careers that they choose and in their contribution to society as they age. The ECEC sector has been wrought with debate over the years, (which still continues) regarding the cost and value of the services provided. I know that the perception is that the ECEC sector is a child minding service only, and that play is not learning. This is incorrect, as research into child development has shown. Children are busy people and when directed effectively will blossom and grow their skills. With better education, comes better children who then grow to be responsible adults. I have been involved in the many changes that have evolved in the ECEC sector over the years. These are all introduced with the understanding that children will be richer for them. Having staff that is qualified and experienced is essential. At the moment in the ECEC sector, educators (at all levels) are disadvantaged by the pay that is offered. Comparisons with other industries with comparable training, shows this. I have found that staff turnover is high due to the poor pay rates, you can work casually at McDonalds for more than an assistant earns. This high turnover in staff affects the children and their families. Research has shown that children learn better with lowered cortisol brain levels. Anxiety raises the cortisol levels in children. Having a stable, caring environment where children are accepted and welcome is necessary to aid a lowered cortisol level. Behaviour is a big issue in schools and this may be in part due to the high turnover in staff in the ECEC sector. Children who have attended childcare for a number of years, in this system of high staff turnover have been subjected to this stress often, resulting in raised cortisol levels. It seems likely that if this has persisted over a number of years, the levels would probably stay high. This fight/flight reflex would allow a heightened response to stressful situations and would probably result in behaviour outbursts and disruptive behaviour as a coping mechanism. The other people who benefit from a stable staff environment is the parents/guardians of the children. In the area where our centre is located we have children at high risk of abuse. Having a person that you know and trust allows parents the opportunity to talk about their problems and for solutions to be found. Thus relieving the stresses on the family. In our centre we have a number of experienced mature aged staff, all who are parents themselves, both married and single, (a brains trust), that is readily available to work through problems with children and their families.

The role of professional wages in ECEC sector would greatly enhance and validate the credibility of Educators working in the early childhood field. As a teacher who has worked in the ECEC arena I believe that the work that is done is important and should be paid accordingly. The sector faces issues that are not found in the school setting and child development knowledge is vital. Of note is the fact that the sector is dominated by women because of the low pay rates. Increasing the pay rates to professional status, for all Educators, would enable more men to consider ECEC a viable option for employment. The sector does need more men. A lot of children don't have good or any role models at home and they would benefit from having a male in their life who showed strength and compassion. Being able to offer professional wages would ensure that Educators were chosen with a more discerning eye and that quality work would be the bonus received.

Staff are expected to keep up to date with current research and training, attend staff meetings, hold and attend parent conferences, family celebration evenings and Kindergarten graduations all without pay. As well we have to hold full first aid, complete yearly CPR updates and asthma and anaphylaxis training on our own time without paid recompense.

I believe that the NQF (or some other independent body) is essential to the ECEC sector. Centres and educators strive for the best possible outcomes for the children in their care and with this 'watchdog' monitoring practices, it can only enhance the work being produced. The paperwork in ECEC sector has always been excessive but when you are in the position that we are in (caring for small children), it is essential to know, develop and implement policies, programs and procedures, although the hours provided for this work are not sufficient. I know of no educator who doesn't take work home to complete there. In essence it keeps us honest and striving for perfection. The joy when a high quality/excellent rating is achieved validates all the hard work that has gone into it and unites the team that has produced it.

Lesley Forrest, Director, Goodstart Boronia Heights

I have made this submission in my capacity as an individual with 15 years' experience working in the early learning and care sector. I am an advance diploma qualified educator with 15 years' experience in early childhood I have worked in a variety of centres including private and community-owned centres; I have worked in all age groups from six weeks to six years. I started as an assistant educator and worked my way up to a centre director. During this time I have seen a lot of changes to the sector from childcare to childcare education as an educator my primary concern was quality of care for each and every child and family.

To this day my goals still stay the same: to ensure quality of care, to assist and guide children in a learning and loving and caring environment.

Many years ago now my first year as a room educator I had the pleasure of helping two foster care children, twin boys, underfed and the most beautiful cheeky children you have ever seen, the boys had not had any social interaction with other children nor the skills to eat of a plate, I would have to be quick at meal times to stop the child from eating any food dropped on the floor. This was a real shock to me. That day I promised myself no matter what I would give all of me to each and every child, the boys were two years of age when they started with me. I watched the children grow in to confident adults I still see both of the children now as late teenage adults, these two boys were lucky one so many do not have the chance to experience love and trust. These two children are why I believe in quality of care, their first years were really difficult I often wonder how they would have turned out if they were not given that chance to attend our service.

This last year I have seen a large amount of families struggling for the funds to pay for care and to hold down a job. Some of my families pay as much for child care a year as they do for a year on their mortgage this means that one of the parents makes just enough to cover the cost of both, why the other parent need to makes enough to pay the bills and put food on the table.

Single parents having to work to cover the cost of living are really struggle sometimes with little to no financial assists. This is causing more application for child at risk as the families are not coping and the children are being neglected, the families are straight to the limited and see no way out.

As a childcare educator I work with the whole family I have seen family in the worst positions help families thought deaths and near death experiences I know how much this mean to each of the family as so many of them are no longer a part of a large family. The funding of the early childhood education and care sector needs to be vastly increased so that we can continue to offer the high level of quality care and education without the ratios increasing, qualifications being watered down. We offer more than education we are what quality of care is all about : looking after the whole family

Cathy Francis, Assistant Director, Goodstart Early Learning Caboolture

My profession is an essential service not only to the community, but to the country. Without us educators, the country would be unable to run effectively as the parents who use our service would be unable to go to work. As educators, we are vital to these young children to help them grow and learn positively. The first five years of a child's development is the most crucial and where we have the most importance as what we teach the children in our care, ensures that they have a stable learning platform for the rest of their lives.

A quality service ensures that the children are in a loving and nurturing environment with the ability to allow each child to learn to the best of their ability, while keeping the environment as close to home as possible which helps transition children and makes them feel secure. Children are engaged and stimulated through a safe and secure environment with Educators providing effective and positive learning experiences for each individual child. Quality services ensure that the environment is not only safe, but has the highest standard of cleanliness. High quality services have high quality and qualified educators ensuring that each child has the best education while at the service.

Professional wages plays a big part of retaining quality educators. Retaining educators, is of the utmost importance as consistency of care plays a major role in a child's ability to learn effectively. A professional wage ensures that educators stay within the sector and is an incentive for further study and reflects that educators are professionally recognised for the work that they do. Professional wages creates a high expectation on the service and attracts only the highest quality educators.

Services within the sector run as a big family creating that loving and nurturing environment for children. Many educators are surrogate parents for a majority of the children within our care. A high staff turnover has a disastrous effect on not only the child's ability to learn, but on the families and every educator. Each educator is expected to create relationships with both children and families, when an educator leaves, this makes the children distressed as the bond is broken. The capacity to feel safe and secure is diminished and this hinders the learning

process for children. A high staff turnover doesn't instil parent confidence within the service or the sector and puts a strain on educators as they need to ensure that children keep learning and the service is still meeting safety regulations.

The NQF plays a vital role in the professionalism of the sector. The NQF has allowed for policies and principles to be put in place to ensure that every service within the country is of the highest standard. The guidelines ensure that all centres are on the same level so no matter where a child goes, they have the same level of education. The NQF has allowed for more meaningful documentation which in turn has allowed each educator to create a highly effective learning environment for each child. The NQF has allowed the sector to be finally looked at as professional and has unified the sector creating strong relationships and networks. Smaller ratios brought in by the NQF, has allowed for a safer environment creating the ability for more 1:1 time with children to highly tune their learning experiences.

There are a few changes that we, as educators, would like to see happen. We would like to have professional recognition of the work we do, not just with the framework, but within the community, government sector and through professional wages. We would like to see a push for better conditions within centre so all centres run high quality services, not some services slipping under the radar and cutting corners. We would also like to see an increase to non-contact time to allow all educators to have the ability to plan and provide the best learning experiences, environment and development plan for each child within the service.

Alexis Herrod, Assistant, Goodstart Early Learning Albany Creek

The ECEC sector is an essential service that caters to the needs of today's families, providing not only learning experiences, but a safe, secure and nurturing environment. The first five years of a child's life is the basis for learning for the rest of their lives and it is essential that the learning requirements that each child has is met.

A quality service ensures the environment is of the highest standards in regards to cleanliness and safety. Open communication with families is key for a quality service ensuring that the needs of both the family and child are met. A well-resourced centre provides for the ability to ensure that each child's learning experiences are unique and tailored to their individuality. Happy, nurturing, caring and committed educators provide the platform for effective and quality learning environments ensuring that there is consistency and reliability within the service. Educators providing the program are qualified with the correct qualifications and are committed to ensuring that every child is learning to the best of their ability.

Professional wages are crucial in ensuring that the sector is able to retain and attract quality educators. A professional wage should reflect the responsibilities and expectations of each educator, which currently it does not. Currently there is a high expectation on educators and a professional wage should not only reflect this, but also provide the platform for professional recognition that this sector so desperately needs and deserves. Providing professional wages to educators within the sector allows us to ensure that we can hire the highest quality

educators, therefore we are able to prepare the children in the most effective way ensuring a strong learning foundation which in turn will allow each child to grow to become an effective part of the future community.

A high staff turnover creates uncertainty and diminishes confidence with parents both in the quality of the educators and the service. Educators are expected to develop relationships with both families and children, high turnover severs the bond developed and effectively can hinder the learning processes for the child. Turnover effects not only the child and families but the centre as a whole as educators feel the strain to ensure that the education process is still working effectively and all safety standards are being met.

The introduction of the NQF has ensured that there are higher standards and expectations on each service and all educators. The framework has created the ability for all services to be on the same level, teaching the same curriculum and ensuring the same quality is achieved throughout the whole nation. The framework has professionalised the sector by focusing on education rather than just care, taking educators from being babysitters to true professional educators. The NQF has ensured that higher safety standards are met by introducing smaller ratios which allows educators to effectively run a program ensuring that there is a capability for some 1:1 time and proper supervision of free play.

As educators we know what works well within the sector and what changes need to be made. The assessment rating system needs improvement as there is no base for standards and everything is open for interpretation. What our interpretation is may differ greatly to the department representative, who then may have a differing opinion to another department representative. With mature age workers, life experience should have an result on their career. Many mature age educators would make wonderful lead educators but are unable to do so because they need to study. The guidelines are too open for interpretation, there needs to be a minimum base for everyone to work from as some services use their interpretation to cut corners this is including the under the roof ratios. Rostering 50% diploma qualified educators at all times in the centre is near impossible on most days as your rostering could change in a matter of minutes due to unexpected illness of one or more educators. We would like to see more program's to help resource services as a whole, not just the kindergarten as each age group is different and has differing needs that are just as important.

Skye Devereaux, Early Childhood Teacher, Goodstart Early Learning Red Hill

I have been an early childhood teacher working in long day care for nine years, prior to that I have an additional seven years working in outside school hours' care. That amounts to over half my lifetime involved in the education of children.

During this time I have seen dramatic shifts in early education, particularly with regards to quality. The introduction of the National Quality Standards (NQS), Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Queensland Kindergarten Guidelines (QKG) have demanded that educators in the early childhood profession up their game and educators are now more

accountable for the implementation of professional curriculums. There are increasing pressures from parent companies, government bodies, and most notably parents as consumers to deliver a high quality educational experience for the children in our care. This is wonderful! High quality education and care is what educators strive for and it's important that these values are being reflected in society. What society is failing to champion are the educators behind the rise in quality education. In Finland, they have one of the most successful educational structures in the world. They value education above almost any other publicly available service and because of this they view their educators as valuable professionals. Educators in Finland are selected from a very small pool and are paid well for their knowledge and skills. A teacher in Finland is as important as a doctor. In contrast, Australia seems to find the worth of an Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) as important as that of a check out operator at Coles. Not to disparage those hard working Coles employees. My point is that many educators working in early childhood education are highly qualified and their pay and working conditions do not reflect this.

I am fortunate to have my wage subsidised slightly by the Early Years Quality Fund though my younger brother is still making significantly more than me in his third year of teaching high school than I am after nine years in long day care (under \$30 per hour). I have the same qualification as ECTs working in primary education (as well as a secondary degree in Behavioural Studies), work comparable hours, teach from a National and State curriculum and enjoy less holidays than my professional colleagues. Why should I not be paid equitably?

For the longest time I was embarrassed to tell people what my occupation was for fear that I would be judged as less than a 'school' teacher, of less merit and of lower intelligence. It is only in the last few years that I have developed a fierce pride for the work that I do and the impact that I have on young children and their families. I am an advocate for quality education in the early years and an advocate for professional recognition and profession pay for early childhood educators.

Jodi Herbert, Assistant Director, Goodstart Early Learning Burpengary

Our profession provides a safe, high quality early years education for many children. As educators, we have the opportunity to have a positive educational impact with a wide range of young children and with many cases, these children receive early education nowhere else. Educators support children in becoming active, aware and engaged members of their community, supporting them to become the leaders of tomorrow. Quality is key in this profession with the need for consistent educators who are satisfied with their job and conditions. A quality profession entails a high standard throughout, not only for the children but for the education of educators within the sector. Quality ensures that we maintain a professional image for the community with an sector focused on the education of children, not making money. A quality services results in families satisfied that their children are well cared for and educated.

Professional wages play a huge role in the quality of the sector. Professional wages ensures quality and qualified educators stay in the sector, resulting in a quality education for the

children. Professional wages ensures low turnover of staff, as they can afford to stay in a job they love and more experienced educators will stay leading to increasing the standards. Professional wages is an incentive for further study and promotes us as Educators, not a commodity to providers or the community.

A high staff turnover limits the ability for attachments to be formed with both children and families. Relationships with children and families are damaged as the ability to provide a safe and secure environment is diminished as well as the standard of educators. The morale of a service is affected as turnover puts pressure on educators to continue with the learning as best as possible while ensuring that safety standards are not compromised. With a high turnover it can be a matter of just surviving the day, not educating young minds as well as the NQS being compromised.

The NQF has increased the standards of education and provides a consistent standard for all children, families and educators. The NQF has granted us the ability to be seen as a profession which has unified the sector. All of this has ensured that not only are we accountable, but services are accountable as well. When running the NQF effectively, the paperwork is diminished and is more meaningful, rather than the old system where paperwork was a quota. More meaningful documentation ensures that the children's learning is guided in a positive and effective way rather than the sake of meeting numbers.

Many good things have come from the changes made to the sector like smaller ratios which allow for an effective and safe education, but many more changes need to come. There doesn't seem to be consistency with under the roof ratios from service to service as it is being interpreted incorrectly. Some service providers are inflexible when it comes to sick leave or annual leave. This sector is a tough sector and if proper care is not taken for the educators, they burnout and are no longer teaching effectively. An increase to sick leave and annual leave would prevent this. The award should be looked at as with some levels of classification, you are losing wages as you are not truly being paid for your qualifications because you are being paid for the title that you hold.

Deana Carbone, Early Childhood Teacher, Karalee Child Care Centre

Parents eagerly await the arrival of a new life, a new member to their family and a citizen of Australia. Priorities change as they seek the best care, opportunities and education for their child / children. The early childhood sector allows parents to continue working in the wider community by providing this care. Karalee Childcare centre is one of these facilities and we are the educators who provide quality care.

Our current employee base consists of eleven educators with the combined service record in the sector of 91 years. Each of our staff members is qualified and or studying in the areas of early childhood education at their own expense such is their dedication to the quality education of Australia's youngest citizens. Experience has shown however that the retention of quality staff in this sector is declining due to;

- Unrealistic demands upon educator's time
- Physical and physiological strains and challenges
- Increased documentation requirements without adequate non-contact time during work hours
- Decreasing admiration for the profession by the wider community
- Continued personal expenses to maintain qualifications and certifications
- Increased invasion of the profession into personal lives
- Professional development requirements during personal hours
- Hourly rate for equivalent professional qualification

To maintain this quality education for children, employees have

- To complete documentation during their own personal time
- Work increased hours when child ratios require extra staff
- Are required to decrease hours and personal pay when ratios drop

Employees have to undertake personal expenses to gain and maintain qualifications

- CPR training each year
- Asthma training / anaphylactic training yearly
- Senior First aid Training every three years
- Fire training yearly
- Teacher registration yearly
- 8 to 20 hours of professional development yearly
- Certificate III and Diploma in children's services
- Bachelor of Education Early Years

If we had better wages and recognition of the professionalism of early childhood educators, we can improve the following:

- Reduce the high turnover in staff
- Increase the longevity in the profession

Could you imagine not having this sector, could you go to work and earn your wage?

Katie O'Keeffe, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Little Mountain

I have been a part of the sector for 24 years and love educating and caring for children in the early childhood sector. Working in the early childhood education and care sector is a hard but a rewarding career. Your day is always full of many responsibilities regarding the care of each child whilst incorporating not only the families requests and cultures but also company standards as well as the rules and regulations as set out in the Child care act.

Quality is a professional service where happy, passionate staff work each day. Where they feel valued by the community, family, the sector and management. This will result in staff who want to come to work each day to make a difference in a child's life.

Changes that need to occur are the up skilling of our workers so they are current in their knowledge of the early years development and education. Professional wages need to be paid to all workers, this needs to incorporate years of service just as teachers in schools receive.

Professional wages would help retain and attract quality trained individuals into the early childhood sector. It also will give parents confidence in leaving their child each day as they know each worker is trained and qualified. High staff turnover leads to an unsettled and unwelcoming environment. It creates unease in families and staff as there are no familiar faces or continuity of care offered for their child. It may cause parents to question what is happening at the service if there is such a high turnover of staff.

The NQF is imperative to quality care and education, it sets the standards of what is expected from every educator nationwide.

It also provides a framework of how to provide the best possible start to a child's education, which ultimately as early childhood educators we aim to instil a lifelong love of learning.

The paperwork is necessary to document every child's learning and development. It also helps keep the sector accountable, documentation is a daily requirement in this sector to ensure quality education and care is achieved.

The sector can be improved by raising the wages of its workers, to reflect the work that they do, this will help retain staff in the sector rather than leaving to go and work in a supermarket or as a cleaner because the income is better. We have many dedicated staff who leave the sector purely because they cannot afford to live on the current child care educators wages. All staff are multi-skilled and perform a wide range of duties that include: educating the child, implementing the NQF and EYLF, supporting the family, involving the community, working alongside governmental bodies, staying current in first aid and CPR, occupational health and safety, admin duties, liaising with the community. The director does all of these duties as well as managing the business, payroll, managing staff, performance management with staff. Organising and implementing centre and community events and daily admin and reporting to centre management to name a few. As you can clearly see early childhood educators are educated, talented, hard dedicated workers who are educating and caring for the future generation.

Kylie Coskerie, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning Narellan Vale

I have worked in the Childcare sector for 15 years and in that time all 20 Centres I have worked at had a high turnover of staff. This greatly effected negatively on the remaining staff, children and parents. It's very difficult attracting good staff on such low pay. At my first Centre, where I was for 8 years, we only had an early childhood teacher for about two of those years. We had a

running advertisement in many papers but mostly received no replies and the few who did interview turned us down the position down once they found out the pay, saying they could get much more money and 12 weeks paid leave at Primary schools.

It's very difficult having to fill these roles ourselves (Diplomas and Certificate III qualified educators) while constantly searching for early childhood teachers as it was a requirement for our centre to have two. It's also very hard dealing with upset children, angry parents and frustrated staff when we lose so many good teachers due to low pay and conditions. Being paid appropriately for the amount of work required from us would not only make us feel more worthwhile but would create a more stable work environment, which would benefit staff, children and parents and add value to our sector as a whole.

Megan Getawan, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Crestmead

My staff and I have thought of some main points that would increase the quality in our work environments and things we would look for as parents bringing our children into childcare. The time we spend with the children can be limited due to the amount of paperwork that is mandatory every day, yes we get two hours a week but this time does not cover what is needed and also takes the main educator away from the children. We would much rather be with the children on their level playing, interacting and educating them so they can get the full potential out of early education. This also includes building bonds and connecting with them so we can learn more about them in turn educate them with their interests, needs and wants.

I think professional wages would play a huge part in how the staff are received. They would feel more valued and appreciated and they'd feel like they matter as a professional and not a babysitter. They should be paid as their qualifications and work load. Personally I wouldn't leave my children with someone that isn't qualified, being qualified means they've studied in the field of work, knows and understands the expectations and responsibilities they need to have working with children. We've had parents ask what qualification the staff have and are happy to hear our staff are qualified in the positions they are working and say "I feel better knowing my child is with someone that has qualifications".

Our centre is quite good with staff turnover as most of our staff have been here for over four years, I've been at this centre for 17 years, this is a big plus for parents as they are satisfied that the staff aren't one day just going to up and leave their child after forming attachments. The ratios we think shouldn't change, if anything go lower. Why should we lower the quality of care by increasing the ratios? This would increase the number of accidents that occur because there are more children to keep a track of, more behaviour issues as children would be fighting for attention, in turn increase the stress levels of the staff, increasing staff turnover and decreasing enrolments and existing families.

The NQF we think play a great role in early education, giving us expectations that we need to meet and follow. This also gives the parents a document that they can look at to show what we

actually need to do and follow to meet standards for their children. The paperwork side is quite simple but it's the time we lack to do it in that's the problem.

Collectively we think that the ECEC could be improved if they keep the ratios to a minimum, this will guarantee quality of care, maintaining a standard of qualifications, educating the staff and getting them to self-educate as well, this will bring them up to date with the latest changes in the NQF and EYLF curriculum. Extra funding being put into childcare centres so they can give their centres facelifts, buy more equipment for learning, this is done with the Kinder funding but what do the centres without one get? All these points would be seen by someone that has worked in the sector and on the council as well. I wouldn't go to a construction site and try to change things when I have no clue how that sector works, I think it should be the same with childcare, someone can't change something when they don't know how it would affect the outcome.

Elaine Hill, Group Leader, Goodstart Early Learning Gatton

I have been in the childcare sector for 18 years. When I began working with children it was considered child minding. No experience or qualifications were needed. Since childcare has grown, changed and developed so much. We are now required and have had to take on so much frequent training and development and hold a minimum certificate 3 in children services to work in a centre, Diploma to be a room/ group leaders and Advance Diploma for 2IC and Directors. Plus hold a Blue and First Aid certificate. All these courses have to be paid for out of our own pockets not the government or centre owner and these are very large costs.

But one thing that has never changed over all these years is our recognition and wages. We are treated like babysitters and our pay is minimal and I am a single mother with two teenagers and am required to work by law and Centrelink pays very little and there is nothing I can do if I don't receive child support it just all too bad. So my children have had to go with out and I have to come to the realisation that I will never own my own home.

Children and caring for them is something I am very passionate about helping and guiding them ready for the big outside world. I have thought about changing my career many times for a higher income but I love my job too much. It frustrates me so much when I look at all the work, qualifications, skills, experience and professionalism I have and my wages are poor to say the least, they are downright appalling and I am considered a babysitter. I am frustrated with the government they expect us to have these qualifications and we have Regulations, Early Years Framework and National Quality Standards to adhere to but no wages to match!

Gayle Middleton, Director, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

I have worked in various early childhood settings for some twenty five years. I have a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) and a Diploma of Teaching. I have worked for the Education Department in the public school system; a community based occasional care scheme and currently within a privately owned early childhood education and care centre. I can

say without doubt that the level of professionalism I am required to display on a daily basis within the early childhood education and care centre (and also within the occasional care scheme) far exceeds those that were prescribed for my role as a teacher within a classroom setting. Each day brings challenges in our efforts to achieve the very best outcomes for our children and their families. Much of the work we do requires the acquisition and application of knowledge well outside the scope of curriculum development for young children.

An example of this became evident when one of the children in our Long Day Care Centre was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. The child was only 18 months old – from a bi-lingual family – both parents working to support the family unit – and now faced with the dilemma of coping with the demands of managing the child’s diabetes whilst maintaining some sort of normality to their lives. Educators at the centre became a ‘life line’ for this family. We sought information and training about the management of Type 1 Diabetes. We were dismayed to find out that the Inclusion Support Model did not support the inclusion of a child with diabetes – in short, no funding was available for an extra educator to support this child’s inclusion. It was decided to finance an additional educator ourselves – effectively running at an operational loss whilst at the same time preparing documentation to formally test the Inclusion Support Model. Much ‘out of hours’ time was spent compiling evidence and developing an action plan to support inclusive practices. We were successful in overturning the original decision – but this would not have been possible without the dedication of professional educators willing to go above and beyond to achieve positive outcomes not only for children but for their families as well.

Another example involves a family whose mother is awaiting surgery for the replacement of a heart valve. She has openly expressed gratitude to the educators’ commitment to ensure continuity of care for her children – to maintain some sort of routine for the children in what can only be described as a stressful time for this family. Again, we might have turned a blind eye to this family but the relationships we form go way beyond what can be written in text books – goes way beyond what can be described in a job description. You can’t put a price on life.

Whilst achieving positive outcomes for children and their families is the focus of our day to day work, as Director of an Education Childhood and Care Centre, I have to admit, my first priority is ensuring the health and happiness of the educators who work at the Centre. It is my belief that looking after my staff will ultimately ensure happy children. As a privately owned Centre, we utilise the wages scale under the Modern Award for our employees. There are many Centres offering above award wages. It is testament to the dedication of my staff that they stay in a job where the remuneration does not reflect the professionalism of the work undertaken. Their work ethic is exemplary - but how long can one reasonably expect this level of commitment for such little take home income. I feel a time bomb is waiting to explode – and in reality it would not be unreasonable to expect staff to pursue alternate employment – a job where the level of personal commitment is small or even non-existent – a job which simply pays more.

The ‘power of the dollar’ not only affects our ability to attract and retain employees but also the decisions families may be forced to make about the care requirements for their children. An

example of this occurred for a child moving from a long day care environment to a Kindergarten setting. Initial assessments for this child indicated that many of the indicators for a successful transition to Kindergarten had not been met. The recommendation was that this child should delay this transition for another twelve months. Unfortunately, the power of the dollar totally influenced the family's decision to pursue a Kindergarten placement for their child. The bottom line being that it would be so much cheaper for the family. How can one argue with this decision? Unfortunately, this may have long term ramifications and most likely it will ultimately cost so much more by way of support programs for the child in the future.

The term early childhood educator encompasses so much. We work extremely hard to provide opportunities for children to achieve the best possible outcomes. We work extremely hard to support our families. We are a multi-skilled work force across a broad job description. An example of this requires educators as part of their day to day work to be conversant with issues relating to bi-lingual/culturally diverse families. This type of work requires the application of a very specific set of skills. Similarly, educators must be compliant in both the acquisition and application of appropriate first aid, anaphylaxis and asthma management. These are not additional requirements - these are mandatory. There is no additional remuneration for such specialised training regardless.

We have embraced the National Quality Framework and see it as the guiding light in the delivery of excellence in early childhood education and care. Our service is in the process of revisiting our Quality Improvement Plan with the expectation of an assessment visit in late March/early April. The NQF strives to ensure consistency and accountability across a broad range and style of service delivery. I believe the notion of our centre being able to present itself as a unique entity under the NQF guidelines is a new and exciting challenge. However, I'm not convinced that families necessarily reap the benefits of this pursuit of excellence in service delivery. It is my opinion that families can potentially have very limited choice – most are desperately seeking a position for their child/children. In an ideal world, families would be able to choose the centre which fits their 'performance criteria'. But with places so limited and fee structures so varied, many may be forced to settle for second or third best.

Allison Walker, Educator, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

I came to work in early childhood education and care after working a year of relief teaching in the public school system. I was looking for a permanent job in a Kindergarten program. I initially thought that it would be short term change because the pay is so low in this sector. Since then I have really enjoyed my work with young children and I have felt very committed to families. It would be difficult to leave.

Money is a significant issue. I live week to week and financially support my migrant husband. I work more than one job just to make ends meet. I do casual party-plan work during the evenings and I work two days a week in a GP medical practice in addition to working four days a week at the Early Education and Care centre. As a casual receptionist, I get a higher hourly

rate than I do in Early Childhood Education Care. This can be up to \$15 more per hour on the weekends but even during the week I am paid \$3 more per hour as a receptionist.

An important aspect of quality in our sector is building strong relationships with families, and being able to maintain good communication with them. We need to be able to work together to give each child the best possible learning and developmental environment. I work with families to educate them on the elements of our curriculum, so that they understand the work with are doing with children and how that links to learning and developmental outcomes.

Another important aspect of quality is stable and consistent staffing. When staff leave, it can be very upsetting for children. Children can form stronger attachments to some educators over others. Last year, I went on holidays for three weeks. I have one child in our room who relies heavily on me so that she can feel settled and content during the day. The mother too, requires support in the mornings to enable her to leave to participate in the workforce. During my three weeks of leave the child was very troubled and upset. It takes time to build attachment with a new educator. Her parents commented to me that she was very upset by my absence and they were pleased to see me back at the centre again. Families are also affected by staffing changes because they too build trusting relationships with key educators. While this was a temporary situation it demonstrates the importance of keeping experienced, trained educators in the sector and the problems associated with staff turnover.

Our centre is physically very close to the local primary school. Many families choose our centre because it presents a very easy transition for them and their children through to Kindergarten and primary education. We work very closely with the school community. Children in our centre know the school kindergarten teachers and teachers' aides because they regularly see them in our room and in the playground space we share as well as during the orientation visits to the school.

Our orientation program has been established to prepare children for formal schooling. We know that school readiness relies heavily on a range of skills and knowledge. We are not focused on developing a child's ability to read or write but believe that a positive start to school centres on a child's social and emotional development. We believe school-ready children are disposed to curiosity, persistence, confidence to 'have a go' and resilience.

Our program includes us taking the children to Kindergarten for an hour each week so that trusting relationships can begin to be built between the child and teacher as well as others in the learning environment.

Interestingly, we work to the same curriculum documents as kindergarten teachers at the school. We communicate with the kinder teachers about this relatively frequently. I believe the difference between our early years setting and the school setting is that we focus on play based experiences. In my view we follow the curriculum more closely, have a stronger commitment to it and document outcomes more rigorously.

The other big difference is that despite having a teaching degree, working to the same curriculum and learning outcomes with children in my care as the Kindergarten teacher in the school, I am paid far less, and have fewer benefits like leave entitlements, compared to a school teacher. It is ridiculous to be in my mid 30s and still struggle to pay my electricity account.

There is a sentiment in the community that teachers belong in schools rather than Early Childhood Education and Care. There is very little community recognition of what we do. While I am regularly asked by family and friends why I am not working 'as a teacher', I know in my heart that I don't want to leave. I have so much to offer to children in the first five years of their life. What is rarely understood, is that teaching qualifications are just as applicable to early education and care as they are to formal early childhood schooling.

Vidhya Chelliah, Educator, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

I have been working in early education and care for three years. I am the educational leader for our centre. Originally I trained in law and worked in that profession in England and Malaysia, however I have never been happier working than I am doing what I do now. There are times when I feel that I should return to Malaysia because it is very difficult to raise a family and live on the income we receive in this profession. I am currently studying my Certificate IV in Training and Assessment supporting my role as Educational Leader within our service and look forward to finishing that before making any decisions. Despite loving my job, I know that I have to move on from this role at some stage or change my career within the sector.

I have applied to University to update my Law qualifications so that I can practice in Australia. I plan to start this mid-year. Unless I make this change we will never be able to save for a deposit for our own home, as two thirds of my salary currently goes on the rent we pay. I know of others who have left the sector for exactly the same reason.

Staff turnover definitely impacts on the children in our care. We spend so much time building relationships with young children and their families. Trust and safety is imperative for a successful learning and developmentally supportive environment. We as educators create this safe space. When one of us leaves, children pay for the consequences. It is the children who have to readjust and start again to build trusting and secure relationships. Of course, staff departures impact on the whole centre, including other staff, the children and families.

While it is not a frequent event in our centre, we had a staff reshuffle last year after losing an educator from another room. It meant that one of our room educators needed to move rooms quite quickly. Her absence was felt deeply by children in our room. There were some who were particularly unhappy – they were unsettled, and had disruptive and unpredictable behaviour. The children affected by this loss were those who had formed particular close and strong attachments to this educator. Families commented about the staffing change and the noticed changes they'd seen in their children.

A high quality early learning environment includes consistency of staff; well trained and qualified educators; low room numbers and smaller centre numbers, strong working relationships within the centre and between educators and families as well as ties to local school communities; as well as management support and respect.

Yuka Herbert, Educator, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

I worked as primary school teacher for ten years and I am very interested in education. We have greater flexibility to deliver a program in Early Childhood Education and Care compared to the in the school environment. We can tailor the program to focus on the individual child.

We set program plans for a child by exploring their individual interests to support their learning and development. This can only happen by spending one on one time with children in play, communicating with them and noticing where they are up to and where to next. We are then able to adapt the curriculum to fit the child.

Children also love group work, for us this includes story time, singing and dancing. I often sing in Japanese, and watch for children's interest in this. I will adapt what I am doing if interest fades. We are a culturally aware centre and often explore cultural differences, and the importance of this in respecting the individual.

I love working with little children. The first five years of life is so important. I work here for the benefit of the children. My friends are working in restaurants are earning more than I am. This was shocking to find out.

Annie Richmond, Educator, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

Quality learning environment give the best opportunities to explore their world. Quality means continuity and consistency of staff for the children. Last year was one of our trickiest of year with staff turnover. I know it was difficult for children to readjust.

An example of this occurred during rostered non-contact time for educators. This is a mandatory requirement and in principle, is an essential component of being able to provide excellence in curriculum delivery. However, it is also a time when children have to cope with a change in primary educator. And if you combine this with staff changes during lunch breaks, annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave etc. – it inadvertently puts stress on the children.

Unfortunately, because of the low pay offered to educators in the sector, the right sort of people are not attracted to working in early childhood education and care. This means that we potentially see people who are not necessarily committed to working with children for the long term. It is very difficult to find and keep good staff.

The feedback we receive from parents is that they are looking for faces they know and trust. Staff retention is therefore very important for families who are looking for a service for their

child. If they know the educators, they are more likely to feel relaxed about leaving their child. When a family chooses our service they see educators with a firm commitment to the children they are caring for. We have close bonds and the children, therefore, are confident in their space.

Karen Lorensen, Educator, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

Training new staff can be very demanding. We are often doing this while we work. We must relay our experience and knowledge to them. If turnover is problematic this can also place higher demand on staff already in the centre.

Quality is happiness: Happy children - happy staff. We strive to establish a beautiful welcoming environment and quality also relies on good management. When parents are looking for a service they need to have a good feeling about the place they plan to leave their children while they work. Parents ultimately choose a centre because of the staff, not because of the physical environment.

Quality early learning environments also rely on good input and communication from parents. We must get as much information about the individual child as possible so we can work with them on their experiences, behaviours, learning and development. Communication with families is key to this.

One educator at our centre has a 16 year old nephew on a traineeship in a different sector. He is getting paid more per hour than she is now, at the age of 40. He is not responsible for lives, yet she is. It was very upsetting for her to discover this. Our pay levels seem so unjust.

Jess McKenzie, Educator, Sandy Bay Childcare Centre

I believe a quality service can be seen when children are enjoying their environment and the people within it. It requires calm educators. Quality is also linked to smaller group sizes and overall centre numbers. This is because educators have more time with children, and closer, more intimate connections.

Support from experienced educators is critical for those coming through training like me. I am still learning, and need the background about why we do what we do. With experienced educators in my room, I can be guided, ask questions of them and learn as I work because they are able to answer my questions.

I have worked in retail before when I was much younger. Despite being in a junior wage grade, I was paid more than I am now. I earned more standing behind a checkout. It seems wrong to me. The work I do in early education and care is far more critical than retail work.

Emma Callanan, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning Blackmans Bay

This submission has been made by the educators from Goodstart Blackmans Bay. The educators in the centre are proactive and engaged in delivering quality early childhood education. Our centre is determined to involve the community, families and children in developing a centre that allows children to grow, develop and build their existing knowledge and give them a foundation to their school life. Our centre has over 20 educators with a 150 years' experience in the early year's sector. We hold qualifications that range from Certificate III, to Diploma to Early Childhood degrees. Being a proactive centre we feel that it is important for us to speak up about our sector.

Everyone feels that we would like to be respected more within our sector. The sector is not respected and in turn the community does not understand the important role we do. They do not understand that we cannot just "leave" when our shift finishes if there are too many children in the centre and the responsibility that come with looking after 75 children per day.

- Chloe – I went to see the career counsellor in school. We were to talk about the courses I had chosen for college. When she saw that I wanted to do the courses that lead into the early childhood education field she told me that 'I was too intelligent to go into childcare.' She said 'when intelligent people hang around less intelligent people they are dumbing themselves down and you should reconsider your career choices'.
- Abbie – my cousin is a cleaner and she has no qualifications, she's 18 and she gets paid \$33 per hour.
- Emma – I am completing my Early Childhood Degree and people think that when I have finished my qualifications then I will go and get a "proper job". But I enjoy my job and I believe this is a "proper and very important job".

If the sector paid higher wages educator turnover would be lower and the children's learning and development would be enhanced. It takes a long time to train an educator in to the role, for them to become familiar with the children and families and for the children and families to become familiar with the educator. If then the educator leaves after a short time the children and families have to begin again to get know the new educators. The more time we have to spend training new educators is less quality time with the children. To meet the NQS and regulations we are all now working towards higher qualifications but this is not being acknowledged through higher wages. If we have to complete higher training we deserve to be respected for the training we are undertaking. Our hard work in training deserves to be recognised and as we become trained and gain knowledge we can pass this on to other educators.

Good quality care also means lower ratios. Lower ratios allow children to learn and develop in a more relaxed and educational setting. Educators can work with children in smaller groups and build on the interests and individual needs of all our children.

We asked parents what they thought. They said the following:

- "I just want to know my daughter is receiving the best possible care. To know that they are taking as much care of my child as I would."- Anita, mother to seventh month old child

- “The quality of childcare at Goodstart Early Learning Blackmans Bay centre is very important to me. This centre has an excellent standard of care and has gone beyond normal means to accommodate my two children who both have multiple anaphylactic food allergies. This was particularly the case with my son who is anaphylactic to wheat, dairy, nuts and egg. He started at the centre when he was 6 months old and on his first day he had very bad skin reactions to washing powder from clothes and the cot sheets as well as perfume. The staff in the baby room changed their washing powder and did not wear perfumed products to accommodate him and make his time there more comfortable. He has progressed through four rooms now and is currently in the Preschool 1 room. The centre staff has made it possible for him to play with toys, enjoy play dough and cook with his friends as other children would without the fear of having a life-threatening allergic reaction. This demonstrates the excellent quality of care provided by this centre. For me it has been a very positive experience that could have easily been different” – Anne, mother to three year old.

In our centre we are all committed to providing quality childcare to all our children and their families but we believe that we deserve to be respected as an sector and have wages that match the important role we do. Our centre supports over 100 families in their ability to return to work after having a family and contribute to the Australian workforce. We also support families that need additional support through our interactions with early intervention centres. We are an important part of the Australian workforce and community and we think we deserve to be seen as such.

Jessica Litfin, Assistant, Goodstart Early Learning Yamanto

We at Goodstart Early Learning Centre Yamanto are a passionate group of childcare workers who believe in what we do and the difference we make to children and their families lives. Most of us have been in the sector close to, or over ten years. We have many discussions on the direction of quality education offered to the children in our care and what we think would truly make a difference to their lives and ours. The following outlines the daily discussions we have as a team.

Quality Early Childhood Education and Care should look like:

- Stability of staff. Children obviously need to have a strong rapport with their educators and in order to have this, staffing needs to be consistent. Not only does this benefit the children it also gives peace of mind to the parents whose children we care for. Having a professional relationship with parents who understand and respect what you do leads to a happy outcome for everybody.
- Having the necessary resources provided to us to ensure the expectations of quality of care are being met. For example, if we are aiming to have a natural environment where children can come and feel ‘at home’ then resources need to be provided for this. It should not be upon our shoulders to change environments without monetary assistance.

- Strict guidelines for signing staff or students off on their paperwork and also their practical work. Due to the high demand of staff/relief staff we feel that sometimes future educators are being 'pushed' through without being examined at a professional level. Often it seems people can be thrown into the deep end without proper orientation or education. More 'on the job' examination needs to be followed through with by the teachers who read and mark their assignments but never actually see them do the job.

Our experiences of the sector have led us to believe:

- We are not respected as professionals. First and foremost we are tired. We are tired of fighting every day to be respected. Whether it's a simple sorry from a parent when you tell them their child punched you during the day and swore at you. Or maybe a smile from upper management when they visit the centre and to ask you how you are going with everything. Recognition from the wider community that without us, they couldn't go and do their job every day. Having the right to refuse care to a sick child who should be at home instead of feeling bad and having to have a friendly debate with a parent as to why their child is not allowed to stay in care when they are ill. Sadly also, our wage reflects the amount we are respected and recognised as professionals.
- The job is stressful. Challenging behaviours, special dietary requirements, long hours, paper work requirements, cleaning, extra duties such as ECT or 2IC, minimal disciplinary rights (no time out allowed). Where do you draw the line? We are taking our paperwork home or having to leave the room to get the paper work side of things done so we can sleep well at night.
- We care. If we didn't we wouldn't be here with a smile on our face every day giving 110%.
- For things to improve more money needs to be put into each individual centre and we need a permanent pay increase. We are professionals. We are qualified in our positions. Why can I leave my job and work at the checkout at the supermarket for more money, less stress, no study required. It doesn't make sense to us.

The following story is from a permanent staff member Jessica. She says, "I have worked in this sector for 14 years. When I finished school I wanted to be a teacher. I started working in childcare to earn some money and fell in love with the opportunity to be able to care for and nurture children. It was my passion and I never left the sector. While I still love my job there are certain things about it that utterly frustrate me. Why at the age of 31 do I still live at home with my parents. It is because I do not earn a professional wage. I am not crazy with money. I am responsible and pay my bills, yet being single, I cannot afford to live on my own and be independent. This sometimes upsets me and gets me down. I feel like I am at the age where I should be financially stable. Yes I could change my career for better financial security but why should I? I have studied my Certificate III in Children's Services and have been a qualified assistant for many years. I enjoy this role. I like helping and being part of a team. We are all special individuals who offer something to create a well-functioning team. I don't want to leave that. I want to be given incentive to stay and feel like my job matters. Children are such happy and valued little treasures, their lust to learn and live is what I enjoy seeing at work every day."

Professional wages for the sector would assist in ensuring quality and parent confidence:

- It is sad when fees increase and parents are under the impression that the fee rise is going towards an increase in staff wages. This has never been the case. For things to improve, absolute recognition of our roles and responsibilities needs to be reflected through what we earn. Not having to worry about financial burdens. Knowing we just need to do the one job to get by instead of looking for a second income to make ends meet. When staff are happy everything flows. The parents see and sense when staff are not happy or working as a team. This is usually always a reflection of how we feel we are valued as professionals.
- Some parents are always going to see us as 'babysitters' but the vast majority don't. Most parents do value what we do. We educate, we nurture, we motivate, we praise, we applaud, we teach, we assist, we clean, and we care. Most parents we have spoken to through various work through the Big Steps Campaign were shocked to learn what the people educating their children earn. Parents confidence can only grow stronger when they see the quality of care provided by people who are no longer doing it for the love of it, but also being recognised professionally for it.

The impact staff turnover has on children and families:

- The one basic element to quality care is first and foremost, is for the child to have a trusting relationship with their educators. This is achieved by spending time with each other, learning each other's boundaries, likes/dislikes. If staff are constantly changing, you have unsettled children who can feel insecure when they are in care. After the relationship is formed with consistent carers the rest of the quality of care flows naturally, the setting and achieving of goals, extending areas of interest. When children are happy their parents are happy. Parents also need to feel secure and have the professional relationship with their child's educators. We believe that professional wages would attract and retain qualified professional educators. High staff turnover has a direct effect on children's wellbeing.

The role the NQF plays in achieving quality:

- Some of the changes made have improved the paperwork load. The observation process has become easier and staff have been given two hours of non-contact time a week to complete and have these up to date. While we believe that the NQF is a step in the right direction, some areas have made our job harder. One example of this is expectations set that can differ with a person's opinions. On one NQF visit we were asked to put multi-cultural plastic food in the middle of the table while the children were eating lunch so they could observe and explore this while they were eating. In the real world this is just not practical. What was the outcome? Children trying to eat plastic food instead of their own food and we had to let them as it was seen as exploring different cultures. Frankly, there is a time and place for everything. Was it necessary for the children to be exploring the food in this way? Sometimes expectations fall short of the 'real world'.

- In our experience, children crave structure and routine. They need limits and we believe this should not be discouraged. Chaos often results from situations that aren't controlled. We feel we have less structure and routine and it is really noticeable in children's behaviour. Does this prepare children for Prep/school? Prep and school both have strict guidelines for both learning and behaviour. This isn't reflected in a long day care environment and it's a worry to think we are setting children up for a rude shock when they HAVE to follow rules when they reach prep or school. Of course, we don't mean be extremely strict with rules but guidance in the early years is so very important and vital for children's learning and understanding of the world they live in.

How can ECEC be improved?

- Obviously a wage increase would not only be fair but a massive shift in the right direction of childcare being a well-respected sector. Acknowledgement from the wider community that yes, these childcare educators do have a massive responsibility and they deserve our respect. This may be achieved by starting with small steps such as more positive feedback from management and licensing bodies.
- For companies who own/run childcare centres to have strict guidelines they need to adhere to, to make sure their centres have adequate resources and to move with the times and the expectations of the NQF. Hold some sort of accountability whether through some sort of fine system for overlooking this or expecting that staff will foot the bill because they 'care' and it's their 'job'. Companies really need to be held accountable for not guiding and supporting their employee's properly.

Kristin Coles, Educator, Little Angels World of Learning

I am an early childhood educator and I have worked in the sector for ten years. There is so much to love about working in the aptly childhood sector; watching the children learn and grow socially, emotionally and cognitively. Quality early childhood education to me is keeping our experienced educators in the sector. Allowing educators prep time, and increasing the opportunities for outside seminars to refresh on subjects such as behaviour management etc.

Professional wages would change the early childhood sector for the better. Professional wages would keep our experienced educators in the sector. As an early childhood educator myself, I have recently left my job in early childhood finish my Bachelor of Education degree to go into the school system because the pay salary is better. Professional wages would also show the rest of the community that we are indeed not only a necessity but an important step to the child's learning.

I personally think that the NQF is fantastic as is, it had made the sector step up the keel I professionalism, however to keep the level of professionalism where it is educators need to be recognised with professional wages.