

Community Child Care Association Submission 25 May 2016

Productivity Commission National Education Evidence Base Inquiry

Community Child Care Association (CCC) is the peak body for community owned and not for profit early and middle childhood education and care services in Victoria. CCC is the Victorian peak body for Outside School Hours Care Services and the Victorian branch of National Out of School Hours Services Association (NOSHSA). CCC is also the Victorian Branch of the national peak body for community managed and not for profit children's services, Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS).

CCC welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission National Education Evidence Base Inquiry. CCC commends the Australian Government for including early childhood education within the scope of this inquiry.

National Educational Evidence Base should include Data and Research on Children's Learning and Development from Birth.

There is now compelling evidence that children are active learners from birth, that the early years are a crucial time for the development of brain architecture and that early learning experiences have lifelong impacts on wellbeing and learning outcomes (Moore, 2014). It is critical that future Australian Government policy and investment decisions take this into account. Investing in comprehensive and ongoing data collection and research into the early years and the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector is essential to inform policy and further develop evidence based best practice.

While learning outcomes for each and every child are of paramount importance the benefits of substantial and well directed investment in the early years go well beyond this.

"A growing body of research recognises that early childhood education and care (ECEC) brings a wide range of benefits, for example, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large." (OECD, 2012, p9)

The scope of data should be across the life-course and should include data on children younger than 4 years and where possible, should cover all children, not only those accessing ECEC. Development of a stronger evidence base for supporting learning in children under 3 years is a priority. Data collection and research must provide a foundation for future resourcing and policy decisions if we are to maximise the potential benefits that investing in early learning has for the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and our nation.

National Education Evidence Base should include a Focus on Dimensions of Quality

The benefits of investing in ECEC are conditional on quality:

“Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects” (OECD 2012, p. 9)

Ongoing data collection and research must include rigorous exploration of the dimensions of quality and their impacts on outcomes for children’s learning and development. Additional priority areas for data collection and research include

- Impact of group sizes on outcomes for children
- Impact of qualification levels of educators particularly those working with children under 3 years
- Impact of continuity (or lack of) of educators on outcomes for children.

National Education Evidence Base should include a Focus on Service Provider Management Types

Results from the National Quality Framework assessment and ratings have consistently indicated trends in quality performance by different management types. For example State and Territory and Local Government managed ECEC services have consistently received the highest ratings, followed by not for profit community managed services (ACECQA 2016, ACECQA 2015, ACCS 2013).

CCC welcomes the inclusion of this data in ACECQA reports and recommends that information about ownership and management types is consistently included in all ECEC data collection and made publically available.

National Education Evidence Base should include Focus on Whole of Child Learning Outcomes

Literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills are historically at the foreground of data collection and measurement of learning outcomes for children. Our understanding of how children learn and what they need to learn has deepened to recognise the fundamental importance of learning dispositions. Rapid changes in technology and rapid changes in how we live have ongoing and evolving implications for education and for the data collection and research that we need to inform policy and practice. How we equip children for the future needs to be fundamentally different to even 10 years ago. This is reflected in the Early Years Learning Framework which includes outcomes focused on learning to learn, identity, well-being and community. Data collection and research across these outcomes must receive as much priority as literacy and numeracy.

National Education Evidence Base should include a Focus on Patterns of Attendance in ECEC

The impact of attendance patterns at ECEC services including number of days per week and hours per day is not fully understood. Research that seeks to understand how these factors influence learning for children and the interplay between this and the family and community context is needed to inform future policy.

National Evidence Base should include a Focus on ECEC Workforce

Qualifications and continuity of staff are key drivers of quality in ECEC. The introduction of the National Quality Framework has seen an increase in numbers of qualified educators and teachers. Pay and conditions for the early and middle childhood workforce are inadequate. Recruitment and retention of qualified staff continues to be an issue for the sector (ACCS, 2015). CCC believes that this is a product of an under-valued and under-remunerated workforce. With a predominantly female workforce this is reflective of broader gender bias in pay and conditions.

In addition to ongoing collection and analysis of workforce data, it is important to match this data with other data collection and research available. For example, is there a connection between the strong performance of services managed by Local Governments and employment conditions of staff who work there?

National Education Evidence Base should include a Focus on Outside School Hours Care

With increasing numbers of preschool and school age children accessing Outside School Hours Care (OSHC), it is important that OSHC is included in the Commission's considerations about the development of a national evidence base.

Historically OSHC services have faced debate about the place of 'education' in their settings. The introduction of 'My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care' in 2011 provided clarity around this. It provides a common language and sets clear expectations of the quality practices expected in the provision of school age care services for children, families and professionals. The Framework recognises the important educational and learning aspects of a recreational service.

The five Learning Outcomes in the Framework; identity, connected and contributing to the world, wellbeing, confident and involved learners and effective communicators are critical goals for children to experience a healthy, happy and connected life. Peer connectedness and social acceptance have long been fundamental goals of the middle school age child. Educators have a complex but valuable role in supporting children to develop a strong sense of self and to remain connected in a world that offers many other ways of being. The Framework's emphasis on play as a learning opportunity values the individuality of each child and provides educators with informed knowledge on the importance of time, space and exploration.

'Children in school age care learn through engaging with their environment in multiple ways. Play is the natural way for children to explore and develop skills and school age care services are in an excellent position to support children's learning through engagement and interaction in a socio-cultural setting. Play is instinctive, voluntary and spontaneous. It gives satisfaction and a sense of achievement. Children's play is purposeful and meaningful and promotes physical, cognitive, emotional and social development' (DEEWR, 2011, p11)

OSHC services are often the main point of contact and support for families with their child's school. They provide education and care for children across the entire 7 years of primary school. For many children, OSHC services play a key role in transition to school.

In many spheres OSHC is no longer perceived as an afterschool babysitting type service, but is recognised as a service that promotes high-quality learning and care, provides age-appropriate

curriculum and maximises opportunities to support children (DEECD, 2014). However, when education and care policies and investment priorities are considered OSHC is often forgotten or seen as peripheral. There is a dearth of data and research in OSHC. It is time for the development of a robust national evidence base about

- The role that OSHC plays in the education of children and how this can be maximised, and
- The opportunities for improved learning outcomes for children that comes with strong collaborative partnerships between OSHC and schools.

National Education Evidence Base should Build on and Link Existing Data and Research

CCC strongly supports the ongoing funding of the Australian Early Childhood Development Census for 2018 and beyond.

CCC strongly supports investment in another pre-birth cohort for longitudinal research. *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* that has been following the development of 10000 children and families is providing important data and evidence about children's learning and development in context of their life experiences. The cohort in the study attended ECEC in 2004-2008, which was prior to the NQF. Another round of this research capturing children's experiences of learning since the introduction of the NQF is a priority.

CCC acknowledges the important role ACECQA has played in capturing and analysing data about services implementation of the NQF. There is great potential to further utilise this data at a local, State and National level. Linking this data with other data sets available (such as AEDC results and data collected by the Australian Government's Department of Education and Training) could provide deeper understanding about how to maximise learning outcomes for children.

A significant amount of ECEC data is already collected. This data however is not always accessible and is not linked. CCC sees potential for a National Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Data and Research to act as a gateway to data collected by different levels of government and other organisations.

References

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