

Submission from

Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW)

to the

Productivity Commission Inquiry into National Education Evidence Space

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Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) welcomes the Inquiry by the Productivity Commission into the National Education Evidence Base.

For too long the early education and care sector has been told that we do not have sufficient evidence of the value of early education and care to claim the need for a universal early education system. We welcome a comprehensive commitment by all Australian governments to the collection of the data required to show:

- The participation of children in early education;
- The nature of children's participation in the early education system; and
- The value of participation in early education on people's lives (including academic outcomes in subsequent education)

Community Child Care believes that the most useful submission to the Inquiry that we can make is an outline of the principles that we believe should govern data collection around early education and an explanation of why those principles are important. Many of the principles we propose provide comment on the questions proposed in the Inquiry issues paper and or speak to the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Proposed principles of data collection for early education

1. That education begins from birth.

There is little doubt that the period from birth to school age is a period where children learn substantially, whether in a formal early education and care setting or not. Moreover as the proportion of children in education and care settings outside of the home increases during these crucial early years, it is important that robust data is collected about the impact of this on children's educational outcomes in later years.

To draw a line at age 4 or one year before formal school age entry is arbitrary and in contradiction with international research that shows that a minimum of two years of formal early education gives the best academic advantage to children.

2. That data collection must collect comprehensive evidence about the characteristics and type of early education that children engage in.

Overseas data and research tells us that early education is of benefit to children, the adults they become and to society. Some Australian studies such as Warren and Haisken DeNews' 2013 study on the *Causal Impact of Pre-school Participation and Teacher Qualifications on Year 3 National NAPLAN Cognitive Tests*¹ shows similar results for Australia. But what research like this often cannot tell us is what are the characteristics of early education services that produce cognitive or academic gains for children in later years? Knowing that a child attended an early education service does not tell us if that early education is run by a government, for-profit or not-for-profit organisation. It does not tell us if it is a high quality service or not. It does not tell us if these things impact on the longitudinal outcomes for that child.

¹ http://melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/conferences/LEW2013/LEW2013_papers/WarrenDiana_LEW2013.pdf

3. That early education has benefits outside of improved academic success in later education and that these need to be measured.

The benefits of early education have been proven via research from US longitudinal studies such as the High Scope Perry Preschool Program and the Carolina Abecedarian Project and UK studies such as the Effective Provision of Preschool and Primary Education (EPPE) project to have wide ranging benefits for children who have access to it, including to the lives of these children as adults. The American economist James Heckman has shown that adults who have participated in early education have better health outcomes at the age of 40. The Australian Council of Australian Government agreed to *A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*² in 2009 that summarised the benefits of early education for children, for adults over the longer term and for society. These benefits ranging from higher productivity (better jobs, higher incomes) to reduced poverty and crime.

It is essential that data collection is therefore not just reduced to longitudinal studies that could produce evidence as to the later educational (ie academic) outcomes for children who participate in early education. All education, but especially early education has wider benefits than academic success as measured via standardised tests such as NAPLAN or PISA.

4. That early education data collection can be improved upon.

There is no doubt that the collection of early education and care data can be improved upon. It is for this reason that the National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care was signed between the Commonwealth, state and territory jurisdictions and information agencies to “develop the early childhood education and care information base”. Subsequent to this the Commonwealth Department of Education commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to undertake a review of the Review of the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection to determine whether this data collection was relevant and effective. Despite this We are still

² https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/national_ECD_strategy.pdf

left with a piecemeal data collection in which even such basics as Australian Government and State Government data are massively contradictory on the proportion of children who access an early education. For an instructive case history on the impact of the deficiencies in data collection around early education, refer to the *NSW's Bilateral Agreement for Early Childhood Education*³ (See the Notes on Data Sources, Coverage and Limitations from pages 12-17)

If despite investing significant amounts of Australian Government funding into early education, the NSW and Australian Government cannot agree on data that effectively answers the question - "Did more children in NSW access early education because of this investment and if so how many?" there is clearly deficiencies in how and what data is being collected.

5. That it needs to facilitate longitudinal analysis

The early education and care sector would submit that early education's benefit is important for young children when they are young children as well as for those children's later outcomes. When trying to explain the benefits of early education during the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Education, the sector was hamstrung by the lack of evidence from longitudinal Australian Studies. Undoubtedly LSAC will go towards fulfilling this requirement but it is important to know for evidence based public policy what happens to children after exiting the early education system.

6. That data collection needs to be easier for education and care services to collect and submit.

Many education and care services are funded by both State and Australian Governments. Data collection is often required by both levels of government but in different formats and at different time periods. Data accuracy is enhanced when collection is simple and when the collecting agency understands the reason for its collection. Where collection is required for funding outcomes this can influence data collection adherence in different ways.

³ http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/early_childhood/NSW.pdf

7. That data once collected needs to be openly accessible to academics and researchers to facilitate research.

Data by itself does not lead to evidenced based policy unless it is subject to interrogation by those trained to do this. Several key data collections in the education and care sector are not as open to researchers as researchers would want (eg ACECQA's Quality Ratings).

All data collected from and with the early education and care sector must be able to be used by the sector and by those with an interest in the outcomes of the sector without barrier.

8. Data collection needs to be collected in such a way that its validity can ensure that early education policy is informed by the evidence

Where data is not collected with transparency and validity, it can be challenged by those who wish to institute public policy in a particular way because "the evidence proves that...". This is something the education and care sector is overtly experienced with. Public stoushes between governments as to data validity (eg Universal Access data disagreements between the NSW and the Australian Government) do not allow data to be used as the basis for decisions about particularly policy implementations.

Community Child Care believes that there will be great benefit in increasing the amount of evidence in the education sector, and in the early education sector in particular. We believe that if the principles above are adopted as to the collection of data for this evidence, better public policy in this vital area of early education will be enacted.

Who is Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW)?

Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) was established in 1978 and is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for quality education and care services; meeting the needs of children, their families and the community.

Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) has a variety of roles in the NSW children's services sector which leave us uniquely placed to provide this submission.

We are:

- ◆ A peak organisation in NSW representing over 1,900 education and care services, families and individual members. Although Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) represents services in all areas of the education and care sector, our full members are community-based, not-for-profit long day care services and community-based, not-for-profit preschools.
- ◆ A Registered Training Organisation offering a variety of nationally accredited VET courses to education and care services in NSW and their employees. We also deliver distance education to employees engaged in undertaking traineeships in education and care services across NSW.
- ◆ The lead agency of Children's Services Central, the Professional Support Co-ordinator in NSW. This program, funded by the Australian Government, under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program, provides a range of professional development to all Australian Government Approved Child Care Services in NSW
- ◆ A provider of highly supported and sought after quality professional development, resources and publications to the NSW early education and care sector, especially preschools, long day care centres and occasional care centres.
- ◆ A provider of three preschools and two long day care services through our wholly owned entity, Children's Services Community Management.
- ◆ A well respected advocacy organisation for early education and care and early education and care services in NSW.

Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) endeavours to:

- ◆ Advocate for accessibility and affordability and supports and resources quality improvement of education and care services.
- ◆ Inform, influence and inspire early education and care services in NSW and Australia.

