

Early Learning Association Australia Submission 7 October 2016

Productivity Commission National Education Evidence Base Draft Report

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak body representing over 1200 service providers in Victoria and across Australia. Our membership includes independent preschools; early years management organisations; integrated and long day care services; government and independent schools; and out of school hours care services.

ELAA's vision is 'excellence in early learning for every child'.

ELAA welcomes the Productivity Commission's *National Education Evidence Base Draft Report September 2016*. The report identifies the importance of seeking more research evidence supporting the role of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the Australian context. Some of the areas in which the report suggests more evidence is required include how participation affects children's outcomes, such as school achievement; and how ECEC programs benefit different groups of children.

The report recognises the value of ECEC as being much more than an enabler of parental participation in the workforce. The report acknowledges that fostering children's educational opportunities can make a significant difference to their long-term quality of life and contribute to Australia's social, economic and human capital in the longer term.

There is a widening disparity between investment in ECEC in Australia as compared with other OECD nations. The international evidence base demonstrates that participation in ECEC leads to improved well-being, improved lifelong learning outcomes and a reduction in poverty, all of which contribute to national social and economic development (OECD 2012).

A national evidence base will help to shape education investment, which ultimately is a means of shaping Australia's future prosperity.

In addition to the principles outlined in draft recommendation 2.1, the further development of a national education evidence base should be informed by the national education goals and:

- The rights of all children to education and care including in the years before school
- Equity in access to ECEC and equity in outcomes for vulnerable children including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children living in poverty, children with a disability and children living in out-of-home care.

Identifying evidence-based practices for maintaining engagement and re-engaging with these vulnerable groups should be a priority as it will have substantial benefits with reduced healthcare, justice and social costs longer-term.

ELAA also welcomes the recognition of well-being as an outcome of education. This aligns with the Early Years Learning and Development Framework which includes outcomes focused on learning to learn, identity, well-being and community.

The ECEC is a diverse sector with diverse offerings. Special care will need to be taken to capture data across service elements such as:

- the type of ECEC service attended (kindergarten/preschool, long day care etc.);
- whether the service is managed by a local government or not-for-profit community-based organisation or whether it is a privately owned and operated service;
- the number of hours attended and the spread of those hours over a week, e.g., full day versus sessional attendance; and
- the qualifications and experience of the educators.

Data and evidence need to be available at the local, state and national levels so as to inform service planning and policy development.

An example of a robust data set can be found in Denmark, which uses administrative registers to collect whole of population data across child care, health, education and employment. An examination of the data in the child care and education registers found that the quality of the child care centre impacted positively on later educational outcomes (*Bauchmüller et al, 2014*).

The draft report acknowledges the value of the relationship between teachers and children and the quality of their interactions as playing a crucial role in children's learning outcomes. The translation of evidence into accessible tools and resources available to ECEC services, teachers and educators will also require substantial investment in communications and training to result in meaningful changes in practices.

ELAA supports the establishment of a new Education Agreement (draft recommendation 8.1). The national evidence-base must be informed by more than monitoring and evaluation of education services. It is critical that there is a genuine and long-term commitment by all Australian governments to a forward-looking research agenda informed by an agreed vision of quality ECEC provision across all jurisdictions and communities.

Yours sincerely

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References

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<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/startingstrongiii-aqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm>