

2 June 2016

National Education Evidence Base
Productivity Commission



By email: education.evidence@pc.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Family Day Care Australia (FDCA), the national peak body for the family day care sector, appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission regarding the National Education Evidence Base.

Family day care supports more than 123,910 families across Australia, providing early childhood education and care for 220,850 children.¹ This accounts for approximately 18 per cent of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector.²

Through collaborative national advocacy, a strong research evidence base, and high public visibility FDCA represents, supports, and promotes the sector in delivering quality outcomes for children.

Background

FDCA supports the purpose of the National Education Evidence Base Inquiry to support and evaluate national education objectives, through monitoring of education outcomes and informing policy development and evaluation.

Forming a robust, easily accessible evidence base will benefit practitioners, policy makers, families and children across Australia. Since the turn of the millennium a wealth of data and research has sprung up tracking and measuring children's cognitive and development outcomes, such as the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) begun in 2004, the 2008 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) or the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) commenced in 2009, amongst others. These studies were established in recognition of the importance of a solid evidence base exploring the impacts of early learning experiences.

However, FDCA agrees with the assertion raised in the issues paper that "data collected on the early childhood, education and training sectors is fragmented and sector-specific with data collected from (and held by) a variety of sources."³ Many of these studies have been conducted in isolation, and data is collected on alternating years, which can lead to a heavy administrative burden on service providers. Furthermore, gaps in the research exist, as well challenges with existing datasets though consistency and comparability.

FDCA therefore puts forward the following recommendations to be taken into consideration by the Productivity Commission.

¹ Department of Education and Training, (2016) [Early Childhood and Care Summary: June quarter 2015](#), p.3

² Ibid.

³ Australia Government Productivity Commission [National Education Evidence Base, Productivity Commission Issues Paper](#), April 2016, p. 16.

Governance and accessibility

Recommendation 1:

The Government should consider a lead coordinating body to ensure consistency of collection and access across jurisdictions and education stages.

FDCA supports the idea of a lead coordinating body, which could serve to centralise education data and oversee national data linkage units. The identification of such an agency would also help to offset the fragmented data within ECEC and likely cut down on the administrative burden that many ECEC stakeholders endure filling in census and questionnaires.

As has been demonstrated by the Public Health Research Network in WA, identified in the issues paper⁴, there is clear precedent that a centralised body would enable data linkage and also help to ensure privacy through a secure file transfer and infrastructure. FDCA would recommend where possible, to utilise an existing experienced organisation to fulfil this role such as for example, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) or the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Recommendation 2:

A national education dataset should be developed utilising a wide scope of existing datasets and consistent definitions throughout.

FDCA supports the ABS' initiative to develop a standardised database of education and socio – demographic information.⁵ Data which should be included in this should include existing data, such as for instance that contained within the child care management system (CCMS) e.g. attendance data, attendance by service type and subsidy payments to, for example at-risk and vulnerable children.

A key consideration for the collection of robust data is nationally consistent definitions across jurisdictions to ensure comparability. Many of the existing datasets available lack consistent definitions. For instance, the AEDC, the LSAC and the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection all use varying definitions for disadvantage or socio-economic status. Even within datasets, such as the annual Report on Government Services, where in some cases, the scope and definition of what has been measured over time may change, rendering the data incomparable.

As mentioned above, a lead coordinating body could also play a role in providing best practice definitions to ensure that education datasets are consistent and comparable (where possible) across jurisdictions and education stages.

Additional data and research policy

Recommendation 3:

A new longitudinal birth cohort should be created to enable cross referencing with additional existing datasets.

FDCA supports the creation of a new Australian longitudinal birth cohort study building from the 2004 LSAC and the 2008 Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). These studies have provided a wealth information, with the ability to benchmark students' progression and achievement and importantly, identify areas in need of improvement.

⁴ Australia Government Productivity Commission, [National Education Evidence Base, Productivity Commission Issues Paper](#), April 2016, p. 19.

⁵ Ibid. p. 16.

The new birth cohort could now be cross-referenced with existing data that has been established since the last cohort e.g. the National Quality Framework and the ratings and assessment data stored by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, amongst others. In the future, this data could also be mapped against the data contained within the improved ICT system intended to take over from the CCMS under the proposed Jobs for Families Child Care Package.⁶

Additional data which could be included in the national database could include child-protection data, Medicare, paid parental leave or Family Tax Benefits.

Recommendation 4:

Funding policy data should be made available in order to enable cross-referencing with existing datasets and to help study its effectiveness.

Currently there is no centralised public mechanism with which sector stakeholders can track the provision, allocation or dispersal of government funding. For instance, in the ECEC sector there are currently multiple streams of non-legislative funding which providers can apply to receive e.g. community support funding, inclusion support funding or professional development funding.

This funding data should be easily and transparently accessible to all stakeholders in one centralised location. In that way the efficacy of funding policy could be mapped easily against other datasets including the AEDC, NAPLAN or the National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census amongst others.

Recommendation 5:

For live data held by Government agencies, an effort should be made to ensure that this data is available live and up to date.

Currently there are certain data available to ECEC stakeholders but there is significant time lag in their availability. The Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary for example is based on data from the CCMS, MyChild website, Department of Human Services and the ABS.⁷ However, this report is backdated by twelve months meaning there is a significant delay to sector stakeholders needing up to date data.

Where possible, the Government should work to ensure that the release of this data is as current as is possible in order for non-government stakeholders to have an accurate understanding of current sector trends.

Long term-commitment

Recommendation 6:

Existing datasets should be bolstered through a commitment to long-term funding.

FDCA urges the Productivity Commission to recognise the usefulness of existing datasets and to recommend a commitment to their continued funding. Over the past decade Australia has made great strides in the establishment of a strong education evidence base, particularly in the area of longitudinal study and in some cases is held up as an example to be followed internationally.⁸ The effectiveness of datasets such as the LSAC, LSIC, NAPLAN, AEDC or the National Early Childhood

⁶ Australian Government Department of Education and Training, *Regulation Impact Statement – Jobs for Families Child Care Package*, (November 2015), p. 99.

⁷ Australian Government Department of Education and Training, [Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary June quarter 2015](#), p.2.

⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care](#), Box 5.4 The use and adaption of the early development instrument [AEDC], p. 187.

Education and Care Workforce Census should be recognised and a commitment to their long-term funding should be made.

Recommendation 7:

The Government should consider the creation of and commitment to a long term research strategy to monitor the efficacy and efficiency of the national evidence base and to drive strategic direction.

FDCA overwhelmingly recognises the need for a comprehensive national education evidence base and believes this could be best achieved in parallel with a national education research strategy. Such a strategy would effectively scan the existing datasets, the ongoing methods of data collection, track funding policy from cradle to grave and identify gaps in data collection and learning.

FDCA broadly supports the scope of the Inquiry but believes that data should also be collected on those children currently not accessing ECEC. In Australia, the early childhood education and care sector has undergone significant legislative changes in a very short period of time. While strides have been made in building a robust national education evidence base more needs to be done to test the effectiveness and efficacy of these policy changes in order to ensure what we're all trying to achieve – the best developmental outcomes for children.

Should you have any questions regarding this feedback, or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact FDCA's National Policy and Advocacy Manager, Orla Hennessy

Yours sincerely

Andrew Paterson
Chief Executive Officer