

Submission in regards to the Productivity Commission's Childcare and Early Learning draft report

I am making this submission from the perspective of a Director of a non-profit, community-based Early Education and Care Centre which provides long day care in a regional area of NSW.

I am happy that the Productivity Commission is supportive of the National Quality Framework as this was a landmark framework to ensure quality for early education and care in Australia. I am concerned that there are some recommendations that may "water down" the National Quality Standards and the rating system. There has not been sufficient time to ascertain the workability of these Standards and not all services have been through the rating process. I believe a separate audit should be conducted once all services have been rated which can look at the consistency of the rating process and the usefulness of the various Standards.

Brain researchers have shown that in the first few years of a child's life, the brain is being "wired" by their experiences. On the positive side, it means that young children's brains are more open to learning and enriching influences. On the negative side, it also means that young children's brains are more vulnerable to developmental problems if they experience a stressful environment or do not receive positive stimulation. For this reason, it is important that the under-3's have qualified educators, at least some of the educators in the room should have a Diploma level qualification or higher. I have trained Certificate III learners at TAFE and know first hand that the course contains only a brief overview of child development. Educators with a Certificate III really need someone with a Diploma or Degree qualification to guide them in their interactions and planning for learning.

I think it is important that the current requirement for an Early Childhood degree-qualified Teacher should be based on the total number of children at a service, not just the number of preschool children as recommended in the draft report. These teachers provide educational leadership for the whole staff and are a vital resource to ensure quality learning outcomes for all children.

Families of children with a diagnosed disability should be able to access funding without families having to meet the activity test. I have worked for five years in an early intervention service and know how stressful it is on a family to have a child with a disability. In regional areas particularly, there are less opportunities for services for these families and they need to be able to access an early education and care service or they will become increasingly isolated, possibly putting these children at risk of harm and certainly severely limiting their development.

It is a positive recommendation that there will continue to be additional funding for these children in the form of a Special Early Care and Learning Subsidy and that there could be funding to upskill educators. Early Education and Care services are inclusive environments which are currently supporting a large number of children with additional needs and their families.

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