

Response to productivity commission into Early Childcare Services.

I run a family daycare service under the Waverley Council Scheme (Sydney Eastern Suburbs). I have operated the service for 8.5 years, providing service to about 45 families and 60 children in that time. I had a previous, completely unrelated, career but have completed a Cert III and Diploma of Early Childhood Services whilst working. The Waverley Scheme has been through 3 QA processes in that time and has always had a High Quality rating (meeting/exceeding standards under latest scheme).

There are several responses I feel compelled to make after reading the draft report, which I hope will influence the final recommendations.

1. While it may be the case that due to the in-home setting and smaller group numbers Family Daycare is often geared towards providing *care/education* for the very young - babies and toddlers - I would strongly disagree with the suggestion that 'education' could be uncoupled from 'care' in order to reduce fees for younger children.

The report seems to interpret early childhood 'education' as primarily preparing 4 or 5 year olds for school in the year prior to attending primary school. It questions whether younger children need education or just care.

I think this an extremely limited view of early childhood education, ignoring completely the very significant component of emotional/social learning - adjusting to an environment outside of their own home or close family, with larger groups of peers – developing independence, resilience, self-help skills etc.

- I also strongly disagree that this emotional/social learning could be just as well 'managed' by an untrained or less qualified person. Quite the opposite.

Also to suggest that this type of social early learning could be left until the year prior to starting school is also very 'optimistic'.

Commonly Family Daycare might be considered a preparation for pre-school and pre-school prepares for school, but there is a large overlap.

In my service I currently have 1 one-year old, 2 two-year olds, 3 three year olds, 1 four year old and two five year olds – more than half are 3 or over. Many of 'my' 3-5 year-old children who are doing 3 or 4 days per week, go to long daycare centres for 2 days per week and stay with me for 2 days. Parents seem to feel this is the best balance of 'school preparation' versus 'the greater emotional challenge/stress of larger centres' - where children spend a long time in care.

Obviously for those older children I provide more cognitive/language learning in my program.

I feel the focus when looking at what is the best form of childcare should be just as much on the size and structure of the service, and hence the emotional challenge it presents, than purely on the 'academic' educational service provided.

Similarly I feel that opting for a Nanny to look after a single child or several siblings in their own home does not provide an adequate opportunity to learn these skills of independence and resilience.

Ideally parents should have a choice of 'sizes and shapes' of early childhood service to choose from depending on the age/temperament of their children.

2. I feel there is potential for some level of cost cutting but that would come from reducing the level of 'documentation' that is currently needed to meet legislative requirements. I spend about 4-5 hours per week preparing, evaluating and documenting children's activities – purely to meet those requirements. I think the children benefit very little from this process – they would be doing exactly the same activities without the documentation. It is also not what most of my parents value.

I currently make observations of children continuously through the day – but they are quick 'shorthand' notes for my own purposes. I also do much of my activity 'creation' on the go, in direct response to the prompts/interests of children, even though I may have planned something very different.

My highest priority of documentation is in the portfolios I make for each child – based on observation notes, lots of photographs and the children's artworks.

Parents and children love them and really don't care whether each photo is linked to the EYLF curriculum outcomes or not. It is clear from photos that their child is engrossed in a productive activity without it having to be spelt out for them.

That said I would certainly *not* be in favour of eliminating or reducing the EYLF – I think the time spent on training for the EYLF and setting up the service to meet the EYLF is very valuable, however once it is put into practice I feel that continuously having to demonstrate/prove to authorities that it is being implemented is a largely unnecessary additional cost.

I am sure that by looking around my service, observing children's ongoing activities and looking at each child's portfolio it would be very easy for an assessor to check if my service is EYLF compliant without folders of documentation.

3. 'Sub-letting' of temporarily un-used space.

The standard 'rule' across the industry is that parents have to pay for a contracted space whether it is used or not – and that carers can re-fill and charge twice for a space they know in advance will not be used by the contractee.

Personally I feel it is fairer on families - eg when taking a month's holiday - to try to fill the space and only charge the child attending. HOWEVER I would only do this with a child already enrolled, but needing extra days, or a younger sibling that is familiar with the environment and waiting for a space.

For a longer term vacancy – 3-6months - I would agree to enrolling a 'new' child, but it may be difficult to recruit a family on a temporary basis, and ensure that they do not leave as soon as something more long term comes up. In that case who is liable for the unfilled space?

Ideally such vacancies would be managed with goodwill on both sides, however it is unfair on both the child and the service to go through a stressful 'settling in' period to fill short term vacancies for parents wanting to hold, but not use, their space. Or for the service to become financially liable for a space being held 'open' - this is especially true in Family daycare where each space represents 25% of revenue.

4. Deemed cost of Family Daycare -

The author/s of the report openly state that it is hard to determine a standard hourly rate for fdc, for many reasons, one of which is lack of access to 'Profit and Loss' sheets.

In the interests of transparency I have provided my figures, which on first look may seem high, but once all costs are taken into account provide a fairly modest income.

I charge \$135 per day – irrespective of a child's age.

\$7 – collected on behalf of the council to cover admin.

\$7.75 to cover three meals and my admin levy to council.

\$13/hr (8.45 am – 6pm) face to face care x 4 days. Plus approx. 4 hours non-face to face - programming, accounts etc = total income \$46.93/hr

No additional fees for wait lists etc

Allowing for 4 weeks holidays, that hourly fee provides total revenue of \$92,350. From that subtract approx. \$25,000 running costs (Would be significantly higher if the property is rented, as in most cases) . Minus 9% super \$6246. = \$60,840 taxable income.

In my own case this is roughly equal to the director of a centre, who in many cases would have higher qualifications. However, I feel there are justifications for that, namely that in fdc you have sole responsibility for the children at all times, plus you are effectively dedicating your home, or in my case half of it, to your service. Under current legislation the house tends to be a 'childcare facility' first, a home second.

In short, I wouldn't do the job at the proposed deemed hourly rate for FDC.

5. While this is not covered in the report, I understand the government is planning to withdraw funding from Family Daycare – I have been told this is on the basis that the number of FDC 'schemes' has exploded, with each one receiving start-up funding. I am told that many close before they have to go through QA and remerge under a new name - suggesting a certain level of fraud.

If this is the case the entry/start up process for FDC schemes should obviously be reviewed, but to suggest withdrawing funding from schemes that have been up and running for decades and from hundreds of educators that are providing good service is ludicrous.