

Carewest response to the Productivity Commission's draft report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning, 2014.

Carewest

Carewest is the peak body for Western Australian community based early childhood education and care services and is a non-profit organisation. Carewest operates as the WA branch of the Australian Community Children's Services National peak body (ACCS). It has a membership covering the breadth of the state. The not for profit sector represents 36.6% of the education and care services sector.

Carewest has members that operate long day care, before and after school care, vacation care and integrated education and care services.

Staff to Child Ratios

Carewest fully supports the current national ratios of 1:4 for children birth to 24 months and 1:5 for children 24 months to 36 months. These ratios have been in place in Western Australia for more than a decade and are factored into the state's fee schedules. The national ratio of 1:11 for children 36 months to 5 years is a lesser standard than WA. Services in this state were vigorous in their support for the 1:10 ratio before and during the development of the National Quality Framework.

We feel that these are the minimum standard and any reversal of them would be a backward step for our sector. The current ratios have created a strong expectation amongst parents. They are also a part of Centres' staff attraction and retention strategy as the *lower than school* ratios are a key reason staff report that they choose the early childhood sector.

Carewest is concerned that Draft Recommendation 7.5, which discusses the notion of "averaging" ratios, will create the unintended consequence of seriously compromising the health and safety of children in early education and care services. Carewest is very concerned that this proposal, if accepted, will lead to exploitation by some services of staff as they will operate out of ratio for extended periods of time.

Qualifications

Carewest members have strongly supported the introduction of increased qualifications through the National Quality Framework and have been working toward their implementation.

Members report strong progress toward this and a high level of acceptance of this by both staff and parents.

Removing the requirement to have skilled educators for children birth to 36 months creates a situation where children will receive lower quality care. Highly qualified staff provide better learning environments for children thus leading towards improved outcomes.

Educators with a Diploma have completed 10 extra units since their Certificate 3 which gives them training in behaviour management, leadership opportunities, higher level thinking with regards to

child development, the implementation of curriculum planning, the inclusion of children with additional needs and management skills.

Carewest members would like the Commission to consider that instead of lowering the minimum qualification for Early Childhood Education and Care, they recommend that by 2020 be the Diploma of Children's Services (Early Childhood Education and Care) be the minimum.

Further information request:

The Commission has requested further referencing on the value of qualification and their impact on the standard of care. Carewest thanks the Commission for this request and provides the following references to assist:

- Burchinal, Howes & Kontos, 2002 discuss that there are many factors related to providing quality education and care that can influence children's development but it is teacher education and training that is most effective in promoting optimal child outcomes .

Burchinal, M., Howes, C., & Kontos, S. (2002). Structural predictors of child care quality in child care homes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(1), 87-105.

- A number of studies discuss that Educators with an undergraduate degree in early childhood education or a related field have been shown to be more responsive to individual children's needs and provide more stimulating curricula .

Burchinal, M., Cryer, D., Clifford, R. M., & Howes, C. (2002). Caregiver training and classroom quality in child care centers. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6(1), 2-11.

- Dwyer, C. M., Chait, R., & McKee, P. (2000). *Building strong foundations for early learning: Guide to high-quality early childhood education programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service. Weaver, R. H. (2002). Predictors of quality and commitment in family child care: Provider education, personal resources, and support. *Early Education and Development*, 13(3), 265-282.

Registered Training Organisations

Carewest members feel that the quality of training being delivered needs to be addressed and that a national review on training is overdue.

Despite there being a regular audit process, training delivery is inconsistent. There needs to be a lift in the minimum criteria to start a qualification in Early Childhood Education and Care, starting with a competent literacy level.

National Working with Children Check

Western Australia has experienced a high number of staff moving to WA from the Eastern States.

Members feel that a National Working with Children Check will create portability for educators to move easily throughout jurisdictions and will reduce costs and pre-employment time. Members though would like to see a thorough, regularly updated checking mechanism as exists in WA, maintained.

Single Subsidy

Carewest members feel that a single subsidy will streamline payments for families and that the payment should go with the child to access the program that they need.

Our extensively experienced Directors feel that payment should be made directly to the service to reduce parent default and increase Centre acceptance of families with significant issues. The eligibility criteria for subsidy payments should be revised and the threshold lowered so that our most vulnerable children in families with high risk issues are not penalised.

In conclusion

Carewest members feel strongly that the Commission should consider the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Article 3 states that “the best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. This particularly applies to budget, policy and law makers”. We each operate our services according to this principle and urge the Commission to make it a focus during its deliberations.