

I am writing in response to the Productivity Inquiry Commission Report.

I have been working in the Education and Care Sector for 20 years and have been working directly with children, as a Manager of a Long Day Care Service and most recently as an Education and Care Consultant. I am also a mother of 2 and grandmother of my grandson all of whom have experienced Early Education and Care.

During my 20 years I have been actively advocating alongside children, families and colleagues to improve and highlight the importance of Early Year Education and Care (ECEC) for all children and the future of Australians living in a “Lucky Country”.

I question the concept of Australia being called the “Lucky Country” as I question the findings of this Inquiry.

How are we the “Lucky Country” when this inquiry states that children for whom their family are unable to access ECEC due to factors such as: It is a parents choice to stay with their children at home and not classified to be working (never mind they choice to volunteer to the community or work with the children’s school). The raising of fees of ECEC will evidently price families out of the market there in affecting some of the most vulnerable children in our society. For these children and families ECEC maybe the only consistent, safe place for them and could in fact be an opportunity to break through social cycles that we know from current research can affect many generations in families ie unemployment, poor health, low school attendance, substance abuse.

Are we the “Lucky Country” when we do not value the importance of professional learning and qualifications for people working with children and families? **Quality matters** and quality of education matters to the children of all ages particularly children aged birth to 3 years. This is proven to be the most crucial to children’s learning and development and will be the foundations of lifelong learning. We must provide the most qualified and experienced educators to this age group. Providing the basics of qualifications to this age group would be working against all current research in brain development and be denying these children the best possible start in life.

**Quality** educators are the key to providing quality education and care. We must attract and retain professionally qualified and experienced people to work with children and families. Professional wages must be addressed as a matter for the government. We must not expect the cost of wages to be considered as a fee increase but an obligation of the Australian Government to invest in the future of Australia.

Should Children, families and indeed all those of us working in ECEC truly be expected to rely on “Luck” to be provided with the opportunity to learn, grow and develop? Or should Australia be known not only a “Lucky Country” but as a Leader, and will show leadership in its understanding and value of Early Childhood Education and Care?

I ask you to keep the National Quality Framework as it is and do not send us back 20 or even 30 years. I ask you to be a country that leads in its understanding and value in Early Childhood Education and Care. I ask you to conclude that **Quality Education and Care Matters** and we can be truly known as the “Lucky Country” because we value and invest in the Early Years to create a brighter future for our country.