

Dear Commissioners Craik and Coppel,

I am writing with concerns about some of the Productivity Commission's recommendations regarding Childcare and Early Childhood learning. I have two children who attend an excellent not-for-profit childcare centre in Sydney four days a week.

My submissions are that:

The commission recommends retaining the child care rebate for all families, regardless of means

I believe all women should be given equal opportunity to return to work after having children. Women are already financially disadvantaged due to inequality in salary scales, difficulty in career progression after children, and lost superannuation during childbearing years. Even for those women earning relatively high salaries, deciding whether to return to work or stay at home with children – or even to have children at all – is influenced by the marginal financial benefit of the woman's return to paid work, in turn strongly influenced by the cost of childcare.

The commission recommends retaining the tax-exempt status of not-for-profit childcare organisations

Not-for-profit childcare centres provide an exemplary childcare service for a reasonable price, often in areas of disadvantage. Their philosophy is child-centred: their guiding principle is to do the best for the child, independent of profit. This produces a better outcome for children, as evidenced by the Commission's finding that not-for-profit organisations provide higher quality education and childcare than for-profit organisations. They are able to do this because all profits are ploughed back into the organisation, and because they are tax-exempt. Their societal benefit is similar to that of charities and schools (also tax-exempt). The argument that childcare should be subject to market forces because it is 'the best' way to ensure that education and care services can meet the needs of families is baseless. This argument would appear ridiculous applied to schools or charities – why should it be applied to early childhood care and learning? Taxing not-for-profit childcare organisations is philosophically unjustifiable.

The commission recommends retaining the current NQF tertiary qualification requirements

I can see three ways that removing the current tertiary qualification requirements will disadvantage children. First, educators holding higher qualifications (Diploma/Bachelor's degree) deliver higher quality care – I have observed this myself over several years in the childcare my own children attend. The tertiary-qualified staff interact more with my children, listen more closely and devise learning/development opportunities based on my own children's needs and interests. Lovely though the less-qualified staff are, they are not as intellectually engaged in the children's development. Second, fewer tertiary-qualified staff in a centre would place more pressure on the remaining tertiary-qualified staff to plan learning and provide feedback to parents, giving them less time to interact with the children. Third, tertiary-qualified staff are less likely to leave a centre – allowing to form

lasting bonds with children, which is very important to make children feel settled and 'at home' in a centre.

Australia is a very lucky country – but our future success depends upon the next generation, more and more of whom are being brought up in childcare. Their ability to thrive and innovate in a competitive world depends upon a quality education – and that education starts from the moment they are born. It is well established that the quality of early childhood education is directly related to adult outcomes. Please recognise the importance of protecting and nurturing our child care system – child care is not just babysitting.

Thanks for your time

Regards
Julie

Julie Wardle