

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

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Dear Commissioners,

I would like to submit the following information to the Productivity Commission - Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning. I am submitting this document as an individual early childhood professional representing only my views and opinions.

My background in early childhood education and care is 30 years long with various levels of qualifications from certificate to degree. I have worked as a child care educator, vacation care employee, teaching director, non-teaching director in both not-for-profit and private services. I also have experience working with children who have additional needs and families in crisis. I have been a consumer of early childhood services as a parent.

I am a keen early childhood advocate in terms of not-for-profit community owned services and most importantly the right of every child to a safe and nurturing education from birth. Humans learn from birth and even more so when they are safe and nurtured, especially when strong bonds with carers and effective partnerships between all parties are formed.

I believe that as a Nation with inclusive and diverse communities, including our First Nation People we are in a unique position to ensure that every child knows they belong, celebrates their sameness and starts life's journey with a sense of being able to achieve.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

I am University trained, and continue to attend University in a Masters program. My colleagues who attended University and now work in the K – 6 sector earn up to \$20,000 p.a. more (this not taking into account that I am a Director with 40 staff + the education and care of 55 children every day, 50 weeks/year and an additional 40 children per day 12 weeks/year during school vacation periods).

As a manager of an early childhood service I have pro-actively undertaken recruitment of University trained teachers. I also recruit TAFE trained educators who provide an excellent balance in the care and education of children. I have been a strong commitment to best outcomes in relation to both education and care of children from birth to six (6). I am finding it increasingly difficult to recruit teachers due to poorer conditions and pay specific to early childhood services.

This submission relates to the following draft recommendations:

- Draft Recommendation 7.2
- Draft Recommendation 7.3
- Draft recommendation 7.5

Early childhood settings in NSW have combined both care and education as co-existing and complimentary dynamics in the provision of quality services for the best outcomes of every child prior to school. Early childhood trained staff including University trained pedagogues provide both the curriculum and care over the course of each day maximising developmental outcomes.

Historically NSW Long Day Care services were required to have a minimum of Diploma level training which dates back to previous regulations. Prior to this the minimum requirement for under 2's was a Mothercraft Nurse with additional child care specific training. These requirements are indicative of the higher needs & vulnerability of children under 3 attending group based education & care.

The 2011 Productivity Commission report Early Childhood Development Workforce study provides further evidence of the importance of not separating care and education:

'However, the OECD (2006) pointed out a number of issues facing the Australian system, including: a fragmented philosophy that continues to differentiate between education and care; a complex regulatory system; and the low pay and status of ECEC staff and the way these affect quality.'

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) 2006, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris.

The International report by the Lien Foundation (2012), *Starting Well – Benchmarking early education across the world*, notes in its discussion on Quality:

'In many countries, one of the main differences between preschool and primary education is the extent of teacher training. Often, preschools are treated as little more than basic childcare centres, with teachers lacking the skills to foster child development. Overall, a well-trained workforce is the most important determinant of quality.' (p. 25)

N.B. Australia ranks 24th in the Quality rating scale of 45 countries. Quality was measured in terms of Teacher Quality and Training; Setting out curriculum guidelines and standards; Sharing parental engagement.

The recent Australian study by Warren and Haisken-DeNew, 2013 provides the evidence that early education requires appropriately trained pedagogues with University level qualified educators providing the best long term outcomes in testing such as NAPLAN, Year 3.

'Several studies have demonstrated that specialized training in early childhood education and care is related to the quality of pre-school teachers' interactions with children. For example, children who are educated by teachers with both a Bachelor

degree and specialized training in child development and early education have been found to be more sociable, exhibit a more developed use of language, and perform at a higher level on cognitive tasks than children who are cared for by less-qualified adults (Howes, 1997; Whitebook and Ryan, 2011).

This research, along with evidence about the long-term benefits of high quality targeted pre-school programs, has led to increased calls for pre-school teachers to have at least a Bachelor degree, preferably with a specialization in early childhood education (Barnett, 2003; Whitebook, 2003; Early et al., 2007).

We also find that the qualifications of the pre-school teacher are very important. Children whose pre-school teacher had a degree on Early Childhood Education or a Diploma in Early Childhood Education or Child Care gained the most from attending pre-school, while children whose teacher had only a certificate level qualification or no relevant qualification showed no significant benefit in terms of Year 3 NAPLAN scores.

The strongest effects are found for teachers having Early Childhood Teaching Degree (ECD), Other Teaching Degree (TCD) and Advanced Diploma in child care or early childhood teaching (CC) in the domains for Numeracy, Reading and Spelling. For Writing and Grammar, there were less stable, yet positive effects for some of the qualifications. Those children having participated in programs in which teachers had only a Certificate level qualification in child care or early childhood teaching (CERT), or had no relevant childcare qualification, later received indistinguishably similar NAPLAN scores to those children who had not participated at all in a pre-school program.

This suggests that it is children who attended a pre-school program with a degree or diploma qualified teacher, specializing in early childhood education or child care, who gain the most from attending pre-school. Thus, the actual training specialisation of the teacher is also important, with immediate policy relevance.'

Warren, D., & Haisken-DeNew, J. P. (2013). *Early Bird Catches the Worm: The Casual Impact of Pre-school Participation and Teacher Qualifications on Year 3 National NAPLAN Cognitive Tests*. University of Melbourne, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

The National Curriculum Early Years Learning Framework is a pedagogical tool to guide educators planning and implementation of learning and does not differentiate educational requirements and learning outcomes for birth to 3 & 3- 5's. The EYLF acknowledges that learning begins at birth.

Contemporary brain research identifies that the first 2 years of a child's life is critical in terms of lifelong brain development and outcomes. Certificate III training addresses minimal aspects of child development and focuses on the basic care matters such as feeding. Diploma level training includes more complex development knowledge however this is limited in terms of brain development. The minimum qualification requirement for this age group should be Diploma with ongoing professional learning in relation to children's development and requirements to meet the unique and vulnerable needs of early learning that impacts on the life course of an individual.

Recent research by Dr Tim Moore on behalf of the Centre for Community Child Health identified the following important points clarifying the need for care and education to be seen as a co-joined in the earliest years of life.

'Previously, infants were thought of as needing loving care and protection but not as active learners or social partners. We now know that children come out of the womb primed to engage with their caregivers, and that the parents are primed to engage with them. We also know that learning starts from birth and that learning and development are cumulative, with later development building upon earlier development.'

Thus, what is 'learned' in the prenatal and first two to three years of life affects not only the neurological system but also the other bodily systems to which the brain is connected, with potentially profound consequences over the life course.

It is no longer appropriate nor useful to view the first two or three years of life as a period to simply keep children healthy and safe, while allowing development to take its course until they reach school age.

□ Caregivers and professionals need fundamental relational skills and qualities supplemented by more sophisticated and purposeful set of skills that enable them to provide children with the kinds

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Increase University trained teacher wages and conditions to parity with school based teachers Australia wide.
- Increase TAFE level trained early childhood educators wages and conditions to above the minimum wage and conditions.
- Improve working conditions for all early childhood educators, paid curriculum development time away from children, paid meeting time etc.
- All RTO's be formally vetted in an ongoing process by ACECQA with an approval number provided for prospective students to choose from.

Recognise that for young children, care and education are inseparable, regardless of the age of the child and the type of service.'

Moore, T. (2104). *Understanding the nature and significance of early childhood: New evidence and its implications.* Centre for Community Child Health.