

Submission comments for the Productivity Commission

As the Director of Cooks Hill Preschool I am writing to provide comments on the expected impacts of the recommendations made in the Productivity Commission report.

My first concern is the removal of 'dedicated preschools' from the scope of the NQF. We have worked hard to implement the NQF at the preschool, and strongly believe this has been beneficial for the children, families and educators. Staff are trained with the NQF as the foundation of their studies, and this framework ensures that the preschool is constantly striving for quality improvement. I fear that the removal of 'dedicated preschools' from this framework will be detrimental for children and families, as preschool is quite unique to formal schooling and must be treated under the realm of Early Education and Care, rather than purely Education.

The greatest concern for our preschool is the Universal Access Funding which promotes four year olds attending preschool at the expense of the three year old children. Cooks Hill Preschool has a well-respected preschool program which is based on experience and the knowledge that children benefit greatly from a two year preschool program. This enables children the time to gradually transition to school whilst also allowing them to create strong relationships with peers and educators. Although all children should have access to preschool in the year before school, this should not be at the expense of those requiring a two year program. In high density population areas, preschool programs could be established within schools, so that positions for four year olds are created rather than taken from others. After surveying families within our preschool and local community, we had a passionate response from families who strongly support the option for children to have access to a two year preschool program. Although the children born from 1st January till the 31st July will be eligible for two years of preschool funding, the children born from the 1st August till 31st December will only receive Universal Access Funding for one year of preschool. After inviting families to provide comments through an anonymous survey, we found there were some recurring comments;

- "The new funding model disadvantages the younger children who would still attend School at the same time as the children eligible for funding and be able to access the preschool school readiness program for the 2 years."
- "This would discriminate against children based on the month they are born in. Some children would be entitled to 2 years of preschool and others only 1. And those entitled to only 1 year would be unlikely to get a place at Cooks Hill Preschool with the current 2 year programme as it would already be filled by kids with the lucky birthday entitling them to 2 years of funding!"
- "I understand the financial temptation, but this is discriminating against children with a later birthday, my previously attending son is September and I believe he deserved the opportunity to attend, as much as his peers born in the earlier months. In fact, those slightly younger children probably require it MORE to assist with maturity, as they HAVE to all attend Kindergarten in the same year. Why should the younger ones have LESS opportunities to ready themselves for school?"
- "I think there is great value in having a Junior programme. One year is simply not long enough preparation for school. It would be frustrating to have to send them to multiple early learning centres prior to starting formal schooling, not to mention stressful for the child. It can take the whole first year just to get used to a new environment, so the real benefit for the kids is really only achieved in being there 2 years"
- "The junior and senior division really helped our child prepare for kindergarten in slow and appropriate time period over the 2 years"
- "I have another child on your waiting list who will not be eligible for the UAF. I believe he deserves the same opportunities as his peers who he will attending Kindergarten with, I don't think it's FAIR to pay extra if the school runs a junior year...but I probably would pay it, as it

would be even more unfair of me NOT to give my child the opportunities his older peers would have with whom he will attend Kindergarten”

- “This really could be described as discrimination by the funding authority”
- “Having had a grandchild graduate from the current 2 year program and watching his progress through his introduction to School and the ease in which he achieved this - as one of the younger members of his enrolment year- can in a large part be given to his attendance at the preschool, for the 2 year program, with children who all commenced School during the same year and received the encouragement and support they required for such a major step in their "sense of self".”
- “My second son was born in January and would not receive funding for the junior year. If he was only able to attend Cooks Hill Preschool for one year I would have to look for an alternative school as I would really like him to have two years of preschool, and I wouldn't want him to have to go through the stress of changing preschools just so he can attend as a four year old. This scheme does not address preschooling from a child's perspective at all. I find the funding arrangement particularly unfair and inequitable, and I can't understand why some children should be allocated twice as much funding and experience as others. It may be considered that the new funding arrangement will benefit disadvantaged children, but at the cost of disadvantaging many more, creating greater inequality. Shouldn't all children be entitled to the same government funding for their education? Furthermore, it will be a financial setback for our family if my son is unable to attend preschool until he is four as I will not have those preschool hours in which to work as I had planned. Another concern I have about this scheme is that there will be children who require more than 1 year of preschool to prepare them for Kindergarten, which may mean that they don't start Kindergarten by the time they are 6 as required by law, and will result in a wide range of ages in the Kindergarten year. This can be problematic in that social issues arise, learning difficulties aren't identified early enough, and resultant behavioural problems occur. With so much uncertainty about how the scheme will actually affect schools and what placements will be available it is a great worry for the majority of preschool families”
- “This would not directly impact my family - our daughter will be 4yo before 31st July - BUT I don't think anyone should be discriminated against - any funding should be spread evenly.”
- “I find this funding discriminating against those children with post July birthdays who are wanting to attend Kindergarten in the same year as their peers with Pre-July birthdays. All children and families deserve equal opportunities, regardless. We are a family with both parents who pay tax etc. and we do NOT feel it would be appropriate for our child to miss out on a 2 year Pre-School offer, based on his birth date”.
- “The preschool program is perfect as it is- please don't change a thing!”
- “Two years of preschool is extremely important for social, emotional and intellectual development. This proposed funding cut would specifically disadvantage children born between August and December.”
- “The two year program is something unique and attractive about this preschool, it would be a great loss to only have a senior program. We would not be able to afford an extra \$20 a day without government assistance for which the preschool is not eligible (not being a day care centre).”
- “Women should be universally encouraged to return to work and be economically productive members of society. 3 year olds should not suffer at the expense of this funding arrangement to fund appropriate numbers of preschool spots for 4 year olds. The overall number of preschool spots should be increased to allow for both 3 and 4 year olds to attend preschool.

My 3 year old not only enjoys preschool immensely but learns vital social, educational and personal skills attending preschool which I am not able to provide in the home environment.”

- “We strongly feel that it would be a disadvantage to our son and to the community to lose the two year preschool program”.
- “I do not agree with the July 31st cut off – it does not match up with the school calendar year well enough”.
- “The two year program has been beneficial for both my kids. They show school readiness beyond other children”.