

To the Productivity Commission

I am an Early Childhood teacher with a Bachelor degree, and 29 years of experience in the field, mainly working within Long Day Care services. In this time I have seen some significant improvements in the education of children aged under 5. Perhaps the most significant of these was the introduction of the National Accreditation Scheme – its main failing being that it was applied only to some of the sector and missed the preschools. The introduction of the NQF and the inclusion of dedicated preschools to the scope was a very positive development, recognizing the universal need for quality education across the sector and the very real need for ongoing improvement. As such I am greatly discomfited by the artificial divide you are proposing in the removal of dedicated preschools from the National Quality Framework, and that they be regulated by states under state education regulations. Interestingly the remaining education sector (primary and high school) seem to be continuing their journey in adopting the National Curriculum – why not the early childhood sector.

I am confused that you recommend that children under 3 require only care, not education and so it is plausible that we need only employ certificate qualified staff to work with them. This rationale says that only 3-5's are being 'educated.' In the next recommendation you note that preschools (filled with children aged 3-5) will not be required to be part of the NQF, when this is the very system designed to ensure that children are being delivered quality education with a focus on continual improvement. Those who were cynical would imagine that the cost of the NQF exercise was daunting for Federal Government and that this exercise was designed to shift the costs of compliance back to the States.

I note that the Commission has found that there is a difference between care and early childhood education.. I would agree in so far as 'care' is simply 'care' whilst early childhood education comprises both education and care – it is inextricably bound. It concerns me greatly that you would imagine that education is of no benefit to children aged under 3. You will note that the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework are written for children aged from **birth to five**. One would have imagined that in calling for such a document in the first place, government must have recognized the value of educating children aged **birth to school age**. The EYLF outcomes revolve around children developing a strong sense of self, and ability to connect and work with community, to be emotionally and socially competent, to be competent communicators and to engage in critical thinking and learning. These are not outcomes that 'just happen.' An incredible amount of work has been put into designing curriculum, in developing our minimally trained child care workers to understand the requirements and then to meet them. A quick look at the contents of the child care worker courses will very quickly reveal it to be largely about health, safety, child protection and care. That services are doing well within the system of NQF is a testament to the dedication of the tertiary trained early childhood educators who spend time training and educating child care workers as to how to work with children, provide education, understand theorists, sort amongst theorists and apply contextually appropriate educational strategies.

A number of peak bodies including Community Childcare and KU Children's Services have presented the Commission with a range of studies into the value of education for under 3's. As such I totally reject your supposition that there are not enough studies into its value. Your call for longitudinal studies ignores the fact that various studies are currently being undertaken, and that our knowledge of children's brain development has recently grown exponentially

I currently work as a Director in a service licensed for 56 children, with 36 of these being under 3. I have 1 colleague who also holds a university degree in education and 5 who hold diplomas. The remaining 7 hold a certificate 3 in Children's services. Your current recommendations re the non-inclusion of under 3's in the numbers used to determine teacher ratios and the use only of child care workers for under 3's would vastly change my employment landscape – and thus the children's educational landscape. I would suggest to you that our service under those guidelines would require one trained teacher (in the preschool room) and the rest of the team could hold certificate 3. This teacher would then be responsible for:

- * the curriculum for the entire Centre,
- * the modeling of teaching strategies – not included in the CCW courses

- * the dissemination of information in regard to educational theory and application, - not included in the CCW courses
- * all licensing requirements – not included in the CCW courses
- * parent education and support,
- * programming for their own group,
- * leading of the team through the NQF including assessment and ratings visits
- * and the list goes on.

There is already a shortage of qualified university trained educators who are willing to work in the early childhood sector. The university courses now almost universally qualify to teach through to the age of 12 – and students are turning to primary teaching due to the level of commitment, knowledge and pressure placed upon those in the early childhood sector. The removal of Diploma and Bachelor training requirements for children under three is going to increase the pressure enormously and contribute further to the choice not to work with under 5's.

At this point I must also discuss with you my anecdotal evidence of the wild variation in the training provided for students undertaking the Child Care Certificate 3. I am in a position where I interview and employ many colleagues with this level of training. It has come to my attention, particularly over the last 5 years that the standards of training and assessment vary wildly. In particular the private college sector has a number of elements who seem to be operating with minimal or no assessment of students. We have a situation where young, under equipped women enroll, pay vast sums to do so, and are virtually given a certificate. There is no evidence of any understanding of the basic elements of their course and they need to be trained (or retrained as it is) to meet a standard where they are even marginally employable. It is these workers who you seek to place in the education and care of our most vulnerable children, the children who are not able to speak up for themselves, who can not express their distress – our children under 3. This is not a casual observation made only by myself. I work within a large not for profit children's service and network with many Directors and managers charged with employing suitable educators. It is highly inappropriate that these 'carers' are left in charge of under 3's, under the limited supervision of someone who is probably the only remaining tertiary trained educator in the service and who is also working with her own group of children 8 hours a day. Should you disastrously decide that you intend to continue to recommend limiting the requirements of educators working with under 3's then you must surely turn your attention to the standards being produced by some of the private course providers.

There are many studies which show that children need responsive care from an adult they have a relationship with. Educators holding higher qualifications enable higher quality care, education and relationships to happen in services. These diploma and degree holding educators not only provide the care themselves by model and coach other staff, developing their skills and monitoring standards provided. Babies in lower quality education and care have higher cortisol rates brought on by stress. Stressed babies are not in an optimum position for development and learning. Parents of stressed infants are not in an optimum position to be productive employees. When ever children are cared for they are learning from the adult providing that care. I am deeply concerned about the learning that will take place when our nurseries are supervised and organized by educators with minimal formal training. It can only lead to low quality baby care services, in all probability caring for large numbers of babies. Separating education and care does not work and is blatantly flying in the face of vast amounts of academic research and 'on the floor' knowledge.

I have noted the call for the removal of 'red tape' in children's services from some sectors within the industry. It would seem, from productivity commission recommendations that the red tape seems to involve qualified teachers and staff. It would also seem that should the recommendations be adopted that affordable childcare and increased workforce participation will be achieved at the expense and exploitation of some of the lowest paid workers in our labour force. Should the recommendations be adopted our childcare workers (cert 3), paid minimal wages will be required to take on some of the most demanding work both physically, socially and emotionally largely unsupported. They will be caring and educating our countries most vulnerable people – infants. A recipe for disaster I should think. The vast majority of workers holding Child Care Certificates are

women. We will have women sacrificed for the benefit of other women so they may return to the workforce. A most unacceptable situation.