

Response to the

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
Draft Report (Productivity Commission, 2014)

**on behalf of the Centre for Early Childhood Research (CREC),
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Draft Recommendation 7.2 Requirements for educators in centre-based services should be amended by governments such that:

- ***all educators working with children aged birth to 36 months are only required to hold at least a certificate III, or equivalent***
- ***the number of children for which an early childhood teacher must be employed is assessed on the basis of the number of children in a service aged over 36 months.***

Removing the requirement to have qualified early childhood teachers working with children under three will result in lower quality education and care which will impact on future social, economic, emotional and educational outcomes of Australian children.

Research evidence demonstrates that:

- the first three years of life lay the foundations for life-long learning and are of crucial importance for all aspects of early learning and development (Gable & Hunting 2011; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2007, 2010);
- the brain is most receptive to the development of verbal skills and language in the early years of life, thus high quality interaction is essential to the development of communication which is central to later achievement (Buckley, 2003; Harris, 2009; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000);
- high quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children. Findings from a five year longitudinal study involving 3,000 children aged between 3-7yrs found that settings with staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart 2004); and
- there are significant cost savings and productivity gains arising from investment in high quality early childhood provision. Heckman's economic modeling estimated that every dollar invested in early childhood saved \$17 on later remedial interventions (Heckman & Masterov, 2005).

Removing the requirement to have skilled early childhood teachers working with children under 3 years of age and increasing child staff ratios creates a context where children are more likely to receive lower quality care and education outcomes.

Research evidence demonstrates that:

- the experiences children have in the first three years of life provide the foundation for social, emotional, intellectual and physical development (Kupcha-Szrom, 2011; NICHD; Sims, 2013). Contextual surroundings have been shown to have an impact on a child's neurobiology, and understanding of how to plan, monitor and assess high quality environments for babies and toddlers leads to better outcomes for young children;
- there is a link between staff qualifications and improved outcomes for young children. Findings from a comprehensive review of literature, on what determines quality in childcare, concluded that caregiver education, qualifications and training appeared to be the most significant factors affecting quality (Huntsman, 2008; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart 2004);
- relationships that are responsive and caring in out-of-home settings are created and sustained through quality interactions between highly qualified educators and children. Research suggests that quality experiences, relationships and environments in the early years are key indicators of later successful outcomes for children (Feldman, Weller, Zagoory-Sharon, & Levine, 2007; Hofer, 2006; Mayes, Magidson, Lejuez & Nicholls, 2009; Meaney, 2010; Perry, 2006);
- secure relationships are built through interaction with qualified and easily accessible staff, thus the number of staff available to young children is a key determinant in the range of opportunities to nurture positive relationships (Yamauchi & Leigh 2011), conversely, when the ratio of staff to children is reduced the level of high quality interaction and care for young children diminishes (NICHD, 2000); and
- higher staff to child ratios enable educators to ensure that appropriate and effective interventions can be planned, implemented and evaluated for children with additional needs (Munton et al, 2002).

Draft Recommendation 7.5

To provide services with greater flexibility to meet staffing requirements, ACECQA should:

- *remove the requirement that persons with early childhood teacher qualifications must have practical experience for children aged birth to twenty four month*

Practical experience with children aged birth to 2 years is an essential component of an early childhood teacher qualification for positive outcomes for children.

Research evidence demonstrates that:

- the effective provision for young children is complex and demanding. It requires highly trained educators who have in-depth understanding, knowledge and practical experience of working with families, staff and early childhood agencies (Bueno, Darling- Hammond, & Gonzales, 2010);
- early childhood educators need to provide quality learning experiences and environments through the development of warm, interactive relationships. Practical experience enables educators to develop their expertise through observations, interaction and reflection in context (Degotardi, 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 2007);
- ‘sustained shared thinking’ highlights the importance of effective interaction between adults and young children (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). Practical experience provides opportunities for authentic interaction between children and pre-service educators, enabling skill development through reflection and analysis (Darling-Hammond, 2006);
- an essential part of working with young children is flexibility. Practical experience allows pre-service educators to refine their pedagogical practices through implementation of their learning and development program (Strategies for children coalition research report, 2000);
- staff who have had practical experience of supporting young children’s behavior through positive intervention and planning for a range of diverse needs make a significant difference to early learning and development (American Academy of Pediatrics; NICHD, 2000);
- teachers other than early childhood trained teachers were found to offer experiences counter to children’s development and wellbeing (Save Childhood Movement, 2014);
- it cannot be assumed that birth to eight courses (as opposed to 3-8) will reduce the number of staff interested in and committed to working in the birth-3 years sector. There are a range of factors that influence decisions made by early childhood educators about working in this sector, these include, low pay, service conditions and the status of early childhood (Bretherton, 2010: Productivity Commission, 2011).

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.9

Dedicated preschools should be removed from the scope of the National Quality Framework and regulated by state and territory governments under the relevant education legislation. The quality standards in state and territory education legislation should broadly align with those in the National Quality Framework. Long day care services that deliver preschool programs should remain within the National Quality Framework.

A national system of quality assurance is an essential step towards a coherent and comprehensive approach to early childhood policy, provision and practice that ensures high quality services for children, families and communities across Australia.

A national system of quality assurance is essential to

Research evidence demonstrates that:

- the smooth transition between children’s services is critical to long-term learning and development (Vogler, Cravello & Woodhead, 2008). National frameworks and regulatory systems for early childhood services enhance the continuity of experiences for children and their families. The OECD (2006) found that consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning by educators help children and families to move confidently between and across settings;
- divisions between care and education are not helpful to children and families continuity of experiences nor to the professionalization of the early childhood sector (Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Kilgallon, & Maloney, 2011); and
- mobility of early childhood staff across state and inter-state will help work force retention and cost of monitoring quality assurance is not duplicated if centralised under one authority.

In conclusion, the evidence clearly demonstrates that dissembling or watering down the quality measures in place will result in lower outcomes in health, wellbeing and education of young Australian children attending children’s services. We strongly believe that young children should have universal access to high quality programs, developed and implemented by qualified early childhood teachers with strong practical skills and appropriate teacher to child ratios. The decisions about early care and education taken as a result of this inquiry will have far reaching consequences for the political, economic, social and educational future of Australia.

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