

SUBMISSION  
to  
PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION  
from

EAST WEST CHILDCARE ASSOCIATION  
Fitzroy, Victoria

**QUALITY, AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

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This response contains the views of the East West Childcare Association staff, parent, children community on the subject of:

**QUALITY, AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

All names of both children and adults, have been included with the express permission of those concerned.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We welcome the opportunity to make a written submission, subsequent to our presentation to the hearing on Monday 18 August, 2014, in response to the Commissions draft report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

*East West Childcare Association* has been operating continuously since 1978. We are a small not-for-profit centre run by parents, offering high quality long day care to around 40 families. It is important to note here, that whilst we write as representatives of the East West Childcare Association community - children, parents and staff - we are concerned with the community as a whole, and want to emphasise the great benefits that society receives from **quality** Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Case examples are included in our submission in order to highlight key points and illustrate children and parents' views and to support and refute some of the recommendations.

Our response, and recommendations, focus on several pertinent areas, which are outlined as follows:

- **QUALITY**

The early years of a child's life are of vital importance, and the positive impact that ECEC can have relies upon high quality education and care. We wholeheartedly support the research by the Centre for the Developing Child, Harvard University (2007), which has identified several key elements that are pivotal to the provision of high quality ECEC, and that have **consistently** produced positive impacts on young children's development. These are:

- highly skilled, regular teachers (draft recommendation (dr) 7.2, 7.1)
- small group sizes and high adult-to-child ratios (dr 7.2, 7.5, 7.1)
- a language-rich environment (dr 7.2, 7.1)
- warm, responsive interactions between staff and children (dr 7.2, 7.5, 7.1)
- age appropriate curricula and the provision of stimulating materials in a safe physical setting (dr 7.1)

- **AFFORDABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY**

For society to reap the greatest benefits, it is vital that any and all ECEC offered to Australian children and their families be affordable. We welcome the Commission's recommendations to:

- Introduce a single subsidy to replace CCB & CCR (dr 12.2)
- Divert funding from the proposed new Paid Parental Leave scheme to ECEC (draft finding 12.1)
- Increase investment in subsidies for low income families (dr 12.4)
- Continue Commonwealth funding for universal access to 15 hours of preschool (dr 12.9)

It is worth noting here that we view ECEC as part of the larger whole that is education and, as such, a communal responsibility. Society as a whole benefits - both in the long and the short term - from children being able to access high quality ECEC; it would seem reasonable for society to contribute through the tax system - with ECEC costs thus being fully federally funded.

Vulnerable children are vulnerable children, irrespective of their parents' employment, student or activity status. Removing the entitlement to 24 subsidised hours of care per week (dr 12.4) for children whose parents are not working or studying would severely disadvantage these children now, and into the future. It would also ultimately prove to be far more costly than supporting these families in the first instance. As we know from the research of Nobel Economist Professor James Heckman:

*An economic analysis of programs (that gave children and their families quality developmental support), reveals that investing in early childhood development for disadvantaged children provides a great return to society through increased personal achievement and social productivity. Heckman (2013).*

We would also strongly urge that funding support for children with additional needs be not only maintained, but increased; and the arduous process of 6 monthly applications for ISS funding be streamlined, simplified and extended to a minimum of 12 months. If we can even hope to create a society that fosters acceptance, does not fear difference but respects diversity, and understands the valuable contribution that individuals can make, irrespective of ability or background, it is imperative that we start with the young.

The Commissions proposed deemed cost model (dr 12.4) has the potential to result in disaster. If the *deemed* cost does not align with the *actual* cost, fees will go up, making ECEC inaccessible to many families. This will only serve to disadvantage children and families, especially those who are already vulnerable and in greatest need of support .

The proposal to disallow the exemptions that not-for-profit centres currently have from paying Fringe Benefit Tax and Payroll Tax (dr 10.1) would severely and adversely effect their viability and affordability.

- **CONTRIBUTION TO PRODUCTIVITY**

It is self-evident that the provision of high quality ECEC is in the best interest of children and their families. Nor can we discount the beneficial flow-on effects to the broader community, in terms of current and future productivity.

In the first instance ECEC allows parents the option of returning to the workforce and then supports them in remaining there. Furthermore, high quality ECEC goes a long way to helping young children grow up to be productive, aware and well rounded adults - the workforce of the future. High quality ECEC has also been shown to be instrumental in breaking the poverty cycle, which in turn saves successive governments huge outlays in social assistance, health and wellbeing costs and further infrastructure investments to support these.

## QUALITY, AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

We firmly believe that **all** decisions regarding children's services should be made with children's best interests in mind. Children's best interests should be the first principle, and underpinning rationale, for all deliberations and any recommendations to the Australian Government.

There are a range of Productivity Commission recommendations that will assist *East West* and all Early Childhood services in their role to help support and develop healthy communities. However, there are also recommendations which will severely impede our ability to offer the quality education that so benefits our children, parents and community. Our response to these recommendations is discussed as follows and is supported by current empirical research. We also include a number of parent and children's testimonials so that their experiences and voices may be considered.

### CHILDREN DESERVE HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE

As stated in the executive summary of the OECD's report *Starting Strong III* (2012):

*A growing body of research recognises that early childhood education and care (ECEC) brings a wide range of benefits, for example, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large.*

*But all these benefits are conditional on "quality". Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects.*

Not only is there ample evidence that confirms the importance of high quality ECEC, but it is something that parents understand implicitly. Simply put, they love their children and want the very best for them. Parents **instinctively** look for indicators of quality when considering where to send their child.

*We send our daughter, Decca, to East West Childcare in Fitzroy. It is by no means the closest childcare centre to our house but it was the **best** childcare centre that we visited, by a country mile.*

*The first thing you notice when you enter East West is that the staff are content. They are happy, calm and relaxed, engaged, intelligent, thoughtful, and deeply concerned with the wellbeing of the children in their care – and, I am glad to say, of each other. These people are engrossed, useful members of the community, and we count ourselves lucky every time we drop Decca off – lucky that she is in the company of people who are so switched on.*

*East West has a high ratio of staff to children. This means that the children are given plenty of attention, and it means that the staff are not anxious. We are happy to pay more for this privilege.*

*It cannot be underestimated how the high quality of East West enhances our family's health and lifestyle.*

*Louise Swinn (parent)*

*Personal experience has shaped our opinion of how critical access to **quality** early childhood education and care is, and the resultant outcomes that not only demonstrate significant impact in nurturing young children, but also the increased potential of successful transition from pre-school education to school and ongoing life opportunities.*

*What this isn't is simply a standard purchase decision where cheapest is best – the overriding issue is one of quality of care – knowing that your child is receiving a high standard of education and care is of paramount importance.*

*Neil Minott (parent)*

*For a first time parent of a young boy with limitless energy and a need for clear direction, we as a family appreciate the need for highly qualified educators, to provide high quality care, education and nurturing. To have your child in a centre where you see the staff are fluid and flexible in their approach and look to explore and support all means in growth and development, whether this be through parental discussion, educational training, attending various forums and conferences and seeking secondary consult, I feel assured that upon leaving my son he will have a fantastic 8 hour day.*

*Celeste Morath (parent)*

*Knowing our son Sidney is being cared for, happy and learning is everything to us. Going to work and knowing he is happy, safe and developing as he should be gives our family an enormous balance on so many different levels; personal, emotional, financial. We are not prepared to compromise the health, safety, well-being or learning and development of our son. The importance of early learning should not be compromised under the guise of affordability.*

*Renae Turner (parent)*

## **CHILDREN DESERVE HIGHLY QUALIFIED EDUCATORS**

It is during the **years** of study that it takes to become highly qualified that teachers gain both their knowledge of child development and their understanding of educational theory and pedagogy. It is this knowledge and understanding that allows them to respond to the national curriculum and incorporate it into their planning & programming, to create an educational environment that nurtures, stimulates and challenges children.

It is this knowledge and understanding that allow them to identify teachable moments, moments that might otherwise go unnoticed. A good teacher will seize upon such a moment and (with their knowledge of each child's needs, skills and interests as a starting point) use the opportunity to scaffold the child's learning, helping them to problem solve, work with others, attempt something new. If teachers do not have a solid grounding in developmental and educational theory and practice, many such opportunities will be missed. nurtures, stimulates and challenges children.

Our parents understand the role that teaching qualifications play in supporting their children's education and care. They also value the support we are able offer them in their role as parents. This can clearly be seen in the results of the survey conducted by advocacy group The Parenthood;

*Advocacy group the Parenthood said a national survey it was conducting found that of more than 600 parents polled so far, 96% did not want qualifications reduced.*

*(The Age, 26/8/14)*

*I strongly believe that staff that are more highly qualified are able to provide better care. Centres that employ more highly qualified educators are able to play an important role in supporting families by sharing advice and information when needed. They not only make*

*considered decisions in their planning of the program to ensure the health and safety of children but they also create a supportive learning environment in which our children can explore and connect and grow emotionally, socially and physically. Highly qualified staff make informed decisions about their interactions with children. They engage with children and reflect and review their interactions and those of the child. They understand how their interactions impact on a child in creating healthy attachments, providing security and offering opportunities for developing independence, creativity and resilience. I think the quality of nurturing interactions that is based on an understanding of child development and self reflection are far higher than the nurturing that is based on a persons' own parenting or baby sitting experiences coupled with a certificate.*

*Judy Weber (parent)*

*Our priority for our son is always his emotional, physical and intellectual well being. We value high quality child care that maintains good staff to child ratios with highly qualified teachers. His initial childcare was safe and secure, the staff were gentle and loving, however we found that he lacked the intellectual stimulation, the education that he needed. With a minimal ratio of staff to children and only the base amount of structured teaching we found our son began to fall through the cracks, becoming listless and emotionally withdrawn after his days at the childcare. In East West we have found a childcare that has a high ratio of well educated and experienced teachers that have the time and knowledge to create a safe and supportive environment to assist our son to be the best and happiest person he can be. We are confident that he is getting the best quality pre-school education as we can see our son flourishing*

*Jode Cowie (parent)*

*Principally, our childcare centre provides a high level of care and education to our child. The number of children at the centre is low and it has an excellent education programme. Each of the teachers is highly qualified and experienced, but also genuinely caring, engaged and supportive of each child and each family. And the teachers share a similar outlook to us.*

*Rudi Kruse (parent)*

*When you hand over the education and care of your child to someone else, you are wishing for the best for their care. When we are at work, we want to know that our children are well looked after and thriving. I am on the committee at my children's childcare centre. I know how much work these teachers put in to their role on a daily basis. Recommending that staff need only possess a Certificate III undermines the valuable work they do and the pay scale they deserve.*

*Camilla Hannan & Van Sowerwine (parents)*

## **CHILDREN DESERVE A LANGUAGE-RICH, STIMULATING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

It is a teachers body of knowledge and understanding, combined with skill, experience and **enthusiasm** that enables teachers to create ECEC environments that are rich in language and learning opportunities, where interactions between children and teachers are warm and responsive, environments where children are **excited** by the learning possibilities that each day holds.

*I like to do playing and climbing and jumping and knitting. And..... my brain is up here (taps head) and that's where I learn stuff! And I like flowers too.*

*Pema (3 yr old)*

*I went to visit East West with my daughter. I will never forget that visit. I sat in the garden and watched a small group of children discussing Archimedes theory of displacement and conducting experiments about floating objects. Another group of girls and boys - all ages - worked together to work out how to move the gym mats up to the jungle gym. The teachers spoke clearly, kindly and respectfully to the children - no baby talk. The teachers watched the children making discoveries and saw opportunities to extend them into further areas - gently directing their learning. My daughter was invited to sit with the kids for lunch - outside in the shade that day. The children all fed themselves, talked about what they were eating, what they had been doing. I was amazed and obviously I joined the waiting list.*

*The impact of the environment and the high quality of the staff on Lily-Jane was dramatic. Her vocabulary increased by about 30 words within the first week. She spontaneously offered 'please' and 'thank you'. She became more experimental but less destructive, more confident with movement to music and simply more confident overall.*

*Hannah Marshall (parent)*

*We are parents of 20 month old twins. We are surprised every evening that they return home with new words and they have developed at such a rapid rate, which I attribute directly to the care and education they receive there. It is obvious they are being exposed to the education and activities the older children are learning at the centre.*

*Anna Martino & Joel Priestland (parents)*

*We need to be supporting these valuable people and understand the contribution they are making to very young children's development. I have first hand experience of my 2 year old daughter coming home and telling me of a new word or activity that she learned that day and it makes me feel a lot less guilty about putting her in care.*

*Romani Mieszkowski (parent)*

*The other day we played a matching game and the new girl played too. She's French, she was teaching me the words. No-one in my family can talk French but now I'm the only one!*  
*Aisha (4yr old)*

## **CHILDREN DESERVE AN AGE APPROPRIATE CURRICULA AND STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT**

Children, like adults are unique, individual beings, developing and learning at their own rate and in their own way. Skilled educators understand this and are able to tailor educational programs to meet the specific developmental needs of each individual child.

*I love coming to East West because I am really interested in science and we have good science books here. I learnt that the brain bit that's the seeing bit is here (pointing to the back of his head), but our eyes are in the front. There is some sort of cord that joins them. Isn't that weird! Oh... and the teachers are actually pretty awesome.*

*Johnan (4 yr old)*

*When I go to East West I get to do so much things that I love and I learn interesting things.*  
*Ella (5 yr old)*

## **CHILDREN DESERVE HIGH ADULT: CHILD RATIOS & HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS**

The research into brain development is clear. There can be no underestimating the vital importance of the first 3 years of life, when 90% of brain development occurs (Perry 2000). It would seem entirely self defeating to offer anything but the very highest quality - educators, group sizes, ratios - to our youngest, most vulnerable and impressionable members of society.

There is significant evidence that demonstrates the contribution that high quality care and education makes to children's brain development, learning and wellbeing (Cleveland & Krashinsky n.d.; Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011).; OECD 2012; Shonkoff 2006). There is also a considerable body of evidence that illustrates beyond doubt the importance of the period birth to three years for children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. (OECD 2012).

Neuroscientists have proven that the first three years are vital for healthy brain development. We are all born with the same number of neurons. At birth each neuron in the cerebral cortex has 2,500 synapses but by the age of 2-3 they have multiplied to 15,000 per neuron (twice as much as the average adult brain). Over the next few years this number is constantly influenced by experience and learning. Experience determines which connections will be strengthened and which will be pruned; connections that have been activated most frequently are preserved. Neurons must have a purpose to survive. It is now implicit that early experience plays a greater role at influencing development than heredity factors (Shore 2001).

It would seem counter intuitive to even consider suggesting that children under 3 only need to be safe and cared for, and that no real qualification or understanding of child development is needed to do this. The importance of small group sizes and high adult-to-child ratios can not be ignored. It is nigh impossible to create or sustain the sort of positive stimulating environments in which children thrive, if group sizes are too large or there are too few teachers per child.

*I passionately disagree with the idea that younger children require less experienced care. If anything, it is this age group of 0-3 that requires the most experienced care as they are not as self sufficient, or able to find their own play, and are just reaching out to learn. They are like sponges, reaching out for so many new experiences and moving on to the next one so quickly. They are highly emotional and easily frustrated and very high maintenance. It takes lots of experience and patience to manage and direct this energy and emotion and inquisitiveness. But everything they see or grasp is a voyage of discovery and learning. If this burgeoning inquisitiveness is met with indifference or a lack of experienced care, it could have a lifetime impact on their keenness to learn and their confidence as learners. Young children need experienced encouragement and a fostering of that inquisitiveness at this age. Properly trained and experienced teachers, who are well supported, are best placed to provide this.*

*Alison Barber (parent)*

*Our children's carers have been motivated, proactive, thorough, dedicated, compassionate, interested and just beautiful. Raising children is obviously constantly evolving and challenging. I remember thinking my first child wouldn't ever need childcare as he would clearly just stay with me however; when introduced to East West I realised what an invaluable experience for both parents and children it was and continues to be. I observed my shy little boy making friends, trying new art forms and games, playing, learning about and making fresh food, developing his language and resilience, venturing out on excursions without his mum and building his confidence ready to make the transition to kindergarten and now school.*

*As busy parents rushing in and out we are always given feedback from the day, made aware of concerns with behaviour or friendships and given time to discuss anything we in turn were ever concerned about.*

*My second son started at East West just before he turned 2. From 18 months it had been noted and explored that he was struggling with his language. Not only did our amazing teachers/carers work with him one on one to help him with communication skills but they researched all possible programs available and through extensive reports and enquiry secured funding through Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) to ensure extra staff could be made available to give my son ongoing one on one time.*

*It is invaluable that these difficulties were observed and addressed in my son before he turned three. It is a highly significant age where his lack of language was and could still be in danger of him socially isolating himself and taking those habits into his early schooling years. If staff numbers had decreased or were of lower skill levels there is no way our childcare educators would have had the time to give my son such focus and then deal directly with his paediatrician, speech therapist and early intervention case worker.*

*Kate Jones (Parent)*

*There have been some decisions made by your Productivity Commission that really concern me. In fact, I can only imagine the additional level of stress they will bring to our home should they be enforced... for example...The lowering of qualifications of carers of children under 3. I don't understand why the mind and well-being isn't just as important at this age. Isn't this an age that is so crucial to the development of the child, intellectually and socially? As such, shouldn't this role be weighted more importantly and therefore require more than a babysitters training?*

*Susan Foley (parent)*

*The child : staff ratio at East West was one of the primary reasons we chose to place our son in their care, taking this information in part from the current NQF, which East West has exceeded since 2011. In my observation, this ratio has played a key part in enabling East West to first identify that our son may have been facing some personal challenges (with each carer having a greater capacity to genuinely get to know and observe the children) and secondly, to give him a level of attention that begins to address some of the concerns they identified.*

*I am genuinely concerned that should services be temporarily permitted to operate with staffing levels below the required ratios, the fantastic work that carers do may be comprised. Certainly, I would question whether my son's challenges would be identified so quickly in such an environment and whether he could be given the support he sometimes requires, without compromising the care of himself and others. For that reason, I would urge the Commission not to implement this Recommendation.*

*Ruth Goonan (parent)*

*The existing staffing level ratios are fundamental to the provision of an educational environment, which affords a foundation for the social, emotional and physical development of our son, guaranteeing him the best start in life.*

*Sally Hussey & Chris Jones (parents)*

*I am also absolutely against the idea that services could temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios. Not only are staffing ratios vital in ensuring the safety of children in care, they are important in ensuring that staff moral is high and that each staff member is properly supported in carrying out their role. Our childcare educators deserve optimum working conditions that allow them to provide the best care that they can give*

*Judy Weber (parent)*

## **PARENTS DEMAND THE BEST OUTCOMES FOR THEIR CHILDREN**

It is the National Quality Standard and Framework that, together, form the bedrock of all that we seek to achieve in ECEC. The standards set the benchmark and the framework enables us to identify and achieve important, necessary goals when working with children. It is in the hands of skilled, dedicated teachers that these are transformed to foster and support best practice. It would be ill-advised to remove any of these elements or see them watered down in any way or remove them from Preschools.

If the Commission's recommendations regarding ratios, qualifications and costs are accepted and acted upon, no doubt many community based services will continue to employ highly qualified staff. It is difficult to see how this can be done without passing on associated cost increases to parents, the ramifications of which, in terms of affordability, are concerning. It will mean that some children will get high quality education and care, and some children will not. This would create a two-tiered system, reinforcing, if not creating inter-generational poverty, with all its associated problems. Poverty is expensive - it is actually cheaper to 'fix' it at the early years stage.

*Investment of time and money in the early years have shown to be far more cost effective than investments made at any other time. Early childhood education is an efficient and effective investment for economic and workforce development. The earlier the investment, the greater the return on investment.*

*Heckman & Masterov 2004; Keatsdale Pty Ltd 2003*

*I urge the Productivity Commission to uphold, and further increase, a standard within the NQF that Australia can continue to be proud of on a local and world scale, and in doing so recognize the broader benefit of what this standard provides for the Australian community and society as a whole: socially adept, emotionally developed and instinctive, cognitive early learners and preschoolers; stimulated, dedicated and highly sought after early childhood staff; emotionally and financially supported parents, empowered to contribute and thrive within Australia's working sector while knowing their children, from young yet critical early-learning ages, are receiving a quality of care uncompromised by the environment within which they are placed to receive such care.*

*Anna McLeish (parent)*

*The NQS as presently drafted has been an important part in ensuring that children receive the most appropriate, highly qualified, care possible, holding providers to be accountable for meeting the standards we consider best supports children in their ongoing development. Simplifying and watering down those standards puts at risk the ability to ensure that high quality care is provided across the board and seeks to make judgements as to which elements are more important than others. For this reason and those submitted by East West, I would urge the Commission not to implement this Recommendation.*

*Ruth Goonan (parent)*

*I am also concerned by the recommendation to remove Preschool from the National Quality Framework. Last year my son attended Kindergarten 3 days a week and then East West the other days. For me it was important for him to stay connected to East West plus I really valued their stimulating activities for him. Kinder was great but, especially in the early months, it was sometimes isolating. And they weren't really able to get to know him. East West was able to play a more familiar role while still also being aware of the kinder program and where he needed to be.*

*Susan Foley (parent)*

## PARENTS DEMAND AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE HIGH QUALITY ECEC

As previously stated, we are concerned with not just our own children, but **all** children. **All** children have the right to high quality care. **All** children deserve all the support we can offer and every opportunity we can provide. In this context we endorse several of the Commission's draft recommendations that would serve to simplify and streamline funding processes thereby enhancing affordability and accessibility. The recommendations we welcome include:

- The introduction of a single subsidy to replace CCB & CCR.

*If we did not receive the current level of childcare benefit and rebate we would not be able to meet the costs of childcare. As it is, **but only just**, my income enables me to support my wife as she completes her studies. I welcome recommendations in the Commission's draft report which would simplify but maintain (if not increase) the level of funding support, and which would help to expand the availability of childcare services. But I do not welcome recommendations which would see those developments come at a cost to the quality of care, by affecting teacher : child ratios, the requisite qualifications and checks for teachers and appropriate teacher remuneration.*

*Rudi Kruse (parent)*

- Diverting funding from the proposed new Paid Parental Leave scheme to ECEC.

*The funds from the proposed parental leave scheme could easily be redirected into childcare subsidy. Surely it makes sense to support women staying in the work force (providing affordable quality child care) rather than pay to take them out of it (parental leave scheme).*

*Camilla Hannan & Van Sowerwine (parents)*

*I completely support more funding and flexibility in childcare to help mothers and fathers return to the workforce, but believe that this could be achieved by scrapping the proposed Paid Parental Leave Scheme and diverting funds to support the current childcare framework.*

*Romani Mieszkowski (parent)*

- Increased investment in subsidies for low-income families.

It is both fiscally and morally appropriate to support all families and it is important that those on a lower income are not over-looked.

*From the toddler years through age 21, children who participated in the quality preschool program had higher test scores in IQ and achievement. They had been less likely to repeat grades and less likely to be placed in costly special education classes—real economic savings for taxpayers. They had been more likely to complete high school. By age 21, they had completed more years of education and were more likely to attend a four-year college. Education for All A Wise Investment April (2005)*

- Ongoing funding by the Australian Government for universal access to 15 hours of preschool.

It is in this vein that we urge the Commission to ensure that **No** child or family be disadvantaged by any of these recommendations. The scrapping of the currently available 24 hours of subsidised access to ECEC (dr 12.4), for the children of parents who do not meet employment, study or activity criteria could severely disadvantage already vulnerable children and families. We believe that the eligibility

criteria for the Special Early Care and learning Subsidy to be too narrow and the application process unnecessarily arduous.

*... it is most important to note that even at reasonable childcare fee costs, which many families would be happy to pay more because of our excellent educators; we live in a community where many families face considerable hardships. One of the most enriching aspects of East West is it's mixture of cultures and socio economic backgrounds where children learn to broaden their human experience instead of being forced to conform to a certain 'type'! Threatening to remove these subsidies will only serve to isolate sections of our community further which has short and long term effects for society as a whole. We have to ask ourselves what do we want for our children's future and our society as they are inextricably linked. Early education is the beginning of this essential human journey.*

*Kate Jones (parent)*

*The National Quality Standards currently in place maintain access and financial support for all families regardless of their socio economic status. Access to high quality childcare must be based on principles of equity, and it is a measure of our society that education is not based on postcode or ability to pay.*

*Sally Hussey & Chris Jones (parents)*

*It is impossible to return to work until childcare is locked in. Only then can you begin to look for work. Therefore there is a period when you may not be working, but of necessity paying childcare. It unreasonably penalizes the person trying to find work if they do not qualify for the rebate until they find work. It also acts against the self employed/own business, such as myself, where I may have gaps between work, but am constantly trying to find new work. I cannot cancel my childcare between jobs and do not know when I will secure the next contract.*

*Alison Barber (parent)*

*Draft Recommendation 12.4 recommends families who do not meet an activity test of 24 hours of work, study or training per fortnight will not be able to access any subsidised child care. This impact on low-income families is very troubling. The affluent will always be able to provide childcare, whether publically or privately. Childcare should be a right for all people not just those who can afford it.*

*Camilla Hannan & Van Sowerwine (parents)*

*Working in the social justice field I am aware that community members are increasingly becoming more aware of the benefits of early preventative services being provided and readily available for young people. A greater emphasis could be placed on the education and care provided to children and the benefits it supplies. For some children the respite that education and care provides can be larger than most may understand, therefore it proves great respect should be shown to the staff that are employed who have an in depth knowledge of child development and a genuine interest in supporting and educating each child.*

*Celeste Morath (parent)*

Of additional concern is the recommendation to base all subsidies on the deemed cost model. This would mean that in order for ECEC services to remain financially viable there would likely be a 'gap' to pay for disadvantaged families.

*I strongly oppose the idea we could use a Medicare model of deemed costs to assess childcare costs. As we know with Medicare, this leaves a gap of often close to 50pc between what the Government 'deems' the cost is and what is actually paid. Government deemed medical cost figures continually lag behind reality and there is every reason to fear that they would do so in the childcare industry also.*

*Furthermore I fear this would penalize centres which employee qualified, and more costly teachers and would act as a deterrent to them to do so as it would force them to charge more than the deemed fee.*

*In this era of computerized record keeping, the Government is well able to collect accurate records of fees paid and reimburse. Stay away from deemed fees.*

*I support the proposal to means test the benefits (although I will certainly lose a proportion of my rebate as a result). Assistance should be targeted to those who need it most.*

*Alison Barber (parent)*

Also, continuing to allow not-for-profit ECEC services exemption from Payroll Tax and Fringe Benefit Tax can only be a good thing, assisting services to keep costs to a minimum, resulting in significant savings to the provider and thus parents through fees.

*The removal of pay roll tax exemptions and FBT exemptions for our centre (a not-for-profit). East West is very much community run, we rely on the support of grants but also, fundraising, the fees and the community around us. In return, East West supports the community back, and for those children in more challenging situations financially. I believe community is important and want my children to believe this too. This recommendation would seriously effect East West and our ability to run financially – the effect could be very, disastrous.*

*Susan Foley (parent)*

## **PARENTS & BUSINESSES DEMAND HIGH QUALITY ECEC TO ENABLE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION**

The provision of affordable, accessible ECEC services will naturally allow parents to return to work. It is the provision of **high quality** ECEC, however, that gives parents the peace of mind that enables them to remain in the workforce and contribute as productive members of society.

*As a parent with two children (4 & 2 yrs) at East West, I cannot stress enough the importance of the National Quality Framework and a quality Early Learning environment. What it ensures is that children get both a great start on their learning journey towards school and life, and also that parents are supported by highly qualified teachers to be well balanced and fully able to participate in the workforce.*

*If it were not for the highly qualified and experienced staff at East West, my family would be on Centrelink payments in order to get by. Initially we thought we would not utilise long day care for our children, however my wife became ill in the second half of 2011 and it became impossible for her to work. This meant it also became very difficult for her to look after our children. I was considering leaving my full time job as a teacher to look after the family, and the only option would have been to rely upon Centrelink payments until my wife's illness was under control. Thankfully, the incredible staff at East West recognised the impact my wife's illness was having on the family, and were able to fit in and provide additional care for our children into their program. Having our children at East West didn't only mean that my wife could take the time to concentrate on regaining her health, but our children were immersed in rich, purposeful learning that enhanced not only their confidence as learners, but nurtured their wellbeing and social/emotional growth as well. On the work front, I was able to retain my full time job and by early 2012 my wife was able to work casually.*

*Michael Stephens (parent)*

*When I visited East West prior to Oliver's acceptance, I felt positive he would thrive under their care – the high ratio of staff to children, the thoughtful learning activities taking place, the happiness of the children, and dedication and high education of the staff were all immediately obvious to me. I felt a sense of family within the childcare centre, which is what I hoped for Oliver, being from such a small family of mostly two.*

*If I had not found childcare of such high quality I would not have chosen to put Oliver into childcare at all, I would not have felt comfortable leaving him under sub-standard care or conditions. As I only began working in the legal profession 2012, to take such a long break from the workforce would have been very detrimental/possibly fatal to my career. This would have caused us to be dependent on Centrelink for much longer.*

*I am so grateful to East West for the invaluable care they provide, giving Oliver and myself the opportunity for a bright and happy future.*

*S McHenry (parent)*

*Childcare is critical in providing our child with high quality care and education, while allowing my wife and I to enter and remain in, respectively, the workforce.*

*Rudi Kruse (parent)*

*There is no doubt in my mind that I would be unable to return to work if the standard of care was compromised. I simply couldn't do my job adequately if I were worried about my children and I would sacrifice our family income to maintain standards for our children. The staff have been knowledgeable, engaged and caring from the moment we began attending and have made our lives both in the workforce and at home, immeasurably better.*

*Hannah Marshall (parent)*

*Putting my child into high quality childcare has given me the opportunity to return back to the workforce, helping me progress in my senior-level career and contribute to society. I am confident to do this knowing that my child receives quality care from experienced, well trained staff. If the people at my child's centre were dull, uninspiring and constantly-changing casual workers, I'd take her out and leave the workforce to care for her.*

*Romani Mieszkowski (parent)*

*Knowing my children were in such a professional yet nurturing environment enabled me the confidence to return to the workforce, engage in extra study and care for my new baby when she arrived this year.*

*Kate Jones (parent)*

*A **financially sustainable** ECEC provision is but one aspect of a much more far reaching issue – productivity impacts parents returning to work – ability to perform your role knowing your child's development and well-being 'is in good care'; businesses – and their focus on building positive workplace culture and more broadly the economy. As shown by recent UK studies that worker stress related issues cost the UK economy an estimated £26 billion per year; the issue of work-life balance should be recognised in direct proximity to productivity.*

*High quality workforce is a major factor in driving quality in education; in the face of increasing competition in the labour market for talented people, there should be support for the best talent to perform their role as effectively as possible.*

*Neil Minott (parent)*

*We should not be trading off the welfare of children for cost. Our children are our future and the better they are as learners the better that future will be. Engaged children will be*

*engaged employees of the future and give back in spades in terms of productivity and reduced dependence on welfare. My children are the most precious things in my life and I would happily pay MORE to have my daughter cared for and educated in the way she currently is.*

*Alison Barber (parent)*

A number of our parents run their own small businesses and have highlighted the important role high quality ECEC plays in allowing them to keep their businesses running:

*I was desperate to return to work as after 18 months having my business on hold (unable to work during the pregnancy) it was in danger of failing. I was in a position where the only thing stopping me from returning to work was not having positions at daycare. If we did not receive the places at East West when we did, My business would have definitely ceased running and I would have been forced to stay home as a full time mum.*

*Anna Martino & Joel Preistland (parents)*

*I am in small business and my wife works for a large government owned corporation. Without this care, I would be unable to support the livelihoods of up to 50 employees.*

*David Haratsis (parent)*

*As I have been unable to find a job I can do part time on a permanent basis since having my third child, I work as a freelance media consultant, running my own business from home. It is impossible for me to work from home with small children at hand. My ability to be productive, contribute to the economy and pay taxes is entirely dependant on the fact I have my daughter in care at East West.*

*Attending East West facilitates my productivity as I am able to seek and undertake work, confident that I can give it my full attention and commitment to my business as my child is being cared for and educated in a supportive, nurturing and engaging environment, whereby she is, if anything learning MORE than she would in my care.*

*Alison Barber (parent)*

The immediate contribution that high quality ECEC makes to a thriving economy by supporting parents in the workforce is clear. What is also clear are the multiple benefits to society in the long term - higher employment rates; better retention rates in higher education, a better educated workforce (of the future), subsequent increased tax revenues, fiscal savings . Various sources have estimated returns on spending of up to 16 times the initial investment.

*US research has also put a price on the economic benefits of government investment in early childhood education, indicating that this can be up to 16 times the cost of the initial investment (High/Scope program: Barnett 1996 & 2002). Investing in the early years can also lead to real savings in education, training, health, welfare and justice both in the short and longer term, because it "helps prepare young children to... become better citizens; they earn more, pay more taxes, and commit fewer crimes"*

*(Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005, p. 2).*

Research conducted by Pricewaterhouse Coopers has also found that:

*"...the greatest gains are long-term in reducing the educational gaps that appear at school to provide better educated workers. Increasing the number of children from the poorest families in early childhood education and improving the quality would at more than \$20 billion to the Australian economy over the next four decades. The report estimates that cost to government of increasing access to, and lifting the quality of Early Childhood Education and Care is about \$412 million a year... (which results in)... only a 0.1% increase in the federal budget".*

*(The Australian Newspaper, 4/9/14)*

Parents clearly see the considerable gains to the children and society as a whole. We call on the Commission and Government to do the same.

*Too often in this society when considering the care and education of children, we fail to consider that they are the next generation of taxpayers, entrepreneurs and employers. They are the backbone of the next generation of affluence in this country, so people such as our lawmakers can enjoy a comfortable retirement.*

*It is their education and care now which is of vital importance to the quality of life of our community 20 or 30 years in the future.*

*David Haratsis*

*It is natural that we, and indeed East West (as they have stated) want to see our son thrive socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively, therefore the high qualified care and education they provide him is of vital importance. The ability to provide this highly qualified care should not just be important to me as a parent, but also to our government, as it ensures our future – our young – are given the best possible start at becoming intelligent, compassionate, socially aware, engaged future contributors to our society.*

*Ruth Goonan*

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## PARENT TESTIMONALS

To whom it may concern,

I write in response to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

We send our daughter, Decca, to East West Childcare in Fitzroy. It is by no means the closest childcare centre to our house but it was the best childcare centre that we visited, by a country mile.

The first thing you notice when you enter East West is that the staff are content. They are happy, calm and relaxed, engaged, intelligent, thoughtful, and deeply concerned with the wellbeing of the children in their care – and, I am glad to say, of each other. These people are engrossed, useful members of the community, and we count ourselves lucky every time we drop Decca off – lucky that she is in the company of people who are so switched on.

East West has a high ratio of staff to children. This means that the children are given plenty of attention, and it means that the staff are not anxious. We are happy to pay more for this privilege.

When I drop Decca off, she is immediately absorbed into an activity, where she is happy. I couldn't believe that someone who hadn't spent any time away from her parents would be so quick to settle into a new place, and it is because she knows she is being cared for. I believe that the staff at East West do everything they can to look after, educate and nurture the small people who are in their care, day in and day out. I think this is a massive job. Anyone who has had to look after children, not just for a short stint of time like a day or a week or even a few months, but for a lifetime, a career, a vocation, will know that there is no job that is more taxing on all aspects of a person – physically, intellectually, psychologically.

Having Decca attend daycare where she is happy and I feel as though she is being encouraged to be a decent, creative human being, means that I can concentrate on my work. I am a publisher and editor and my work often involves great attention to detail. This is impossible to achieve if I am distracted with worry about whether my child is being properly cared for and engaged.

It is in the best interest of the child, the parents and families, and the workers at the centre to maintain a really high quality service. It cannot be underestimated how the high quality of East West enhances our family's health and lifestyle.

Please do not hesitate to be in touch if you have any questions regarding my thoughts above.

Yours,

Louise Swinn  
Sleepers Publishing, Editorial Director  
Stella Prize, Board Chair

## ASPIRATIONS

We see our aspirations for our daughter's ongoing development as being symbiotic to our hopes and expectations of the childcare environment to which she is exposed. I believe it is safe to assume that largely children under three are inquisitive, creative thinkers, already expressive, with the process of personality development well under way.

We saw in our daughter's case that this was a pivotal stage for her to benefit from greater social inclusion and the conditions to grow within an environment that propagates them as 'people', allowing them to forge their own identity and personal attributes. Personal experience has shaped our opinion of how critical access to 'quality' early childhood education and care is, and the resultant outcomes that not only demonstrate significant impact in nurturing young children, but also the increased potential of successful transition from pre-school education to school and ongoing life opportunities.

## A PARENT'S VIEW OF ECEC LANDSCAPE

### Care assessment:

Whilst the difficulties that inevitably arise in finding ECEC are well known – locality, cost effectiveness, quality of education and care and availability of days inline with working commitments. What this isn't is simply a standard purchase decision where cheapest is best – the overriding issue is one of quality of care – knowing that your child is receiving a high standard of education and care is of paramount importance.

### Productivity:

A 'financially sustainable' ECEC provision is but one aspect of a much more far reaching issue – productivity impacts parents returning to work – ability to perform your role knowing your child's development and well-being 'is in good care'; businesses – and their focus on building positive workplace culture and more broadly the economy. As shown by recent UK studies that worker stress related issues cost the UK economy an estimated £26 billion per year; the issue of work-life balance should be recognised in direct proximity to productivity.

### Progression not regression:

Continual staff development and improvement; childhood education will improve by meaningful investment in the knowledge and skill of educators. There should be high expectations on qualifications required to work in childcare as well as assistance for those seeking to progress and gain higher qualifications. The trickle-down effect transforming standards of childhood education and care; where staff are better equipped and qualified to provide a learning environment that promotes questioning and curiosity, that stimulates creativity and connects learning to real world experiences. Bottom line: children meeting their learning potential should be the instrumental purpose.

### Be brilliant and inspire brilliance:

As a subset issue to the above: attracting and retaining 'best' talent should be a priority – as the theory goes, students who live their lives in the presence of adults who are engaged in continuous learning and improvement will themselves become self-managed learners. High quality workforce is a major factor in driving quality in education; in the face of increasing competition in the labour market for talented people, there should be support for the best talent to perform their role as effectively as possible.

Lastly I would think that public perception is also an important factor: the Government's well-publicised desire for a "world-class education system" should not be a hollow gesture; recognising the community value of early childhood education instead its economic wealth should be enshrined as a core aspect of the policymaker's mission. '

Neil Minott

For a first time parent of a young boy with limitless energy and a need for clear direction, we as a family appreciate the need for highly qualified educators, to provide high quality care, education and nurturing. This level of professionalism and concern for a child's wellbeing instils values within a child, when at this stage in their young lives it's imperative to relay such remodelling due to their spongelike characters.

Due to a geographical change our son has now been in 3 different centres, commencing 3 days per week at the tender age of 8 months and increasing to 5 days after the 12 months mark. Fortunately 2 of these 3 centres have matched our philosophy, both as people and as parents with a keen interest in the curriculum and care that is offered to all children. On paper and in practice, both centre's housed a similar number of children and offered almost mirror like educational opportunities. In terms of educators the similarities were evident. Seemingly in both, staff are given professional development opportunities along with employing staff who have a certain level of qualification and experience, therefore creating an environment which houses multidisciplinary conversations. Conversely the 3<sup>rd</sup> centre operated as a business, with limited vested interest in the education and wellbeing of the children, the centre employing various staff with only a base level of education. The majority of the staff employed were also transient and therefore were unhappy or seeking employment for the purpose of making money, certainly not for appreciating the privileged position one is in when nurturing such inquisitive minds. Unfortunately due to limited spacing and long wait times for a high quality service, my son's placement in this centre was grossly extended however the experience has increased awareness of the need for encouragement and opportunity to be provided to ALL staff within the field.

Working in the social justice field I am aware that community members are increasingly becoming more aware of the benefits of early preventative services being provided and readily available for young people. A greater emphasis could be placed on the education and care provided to children and the benefits it supplies. For some children the respite that education and care provides can be larger than most may understand, therefore it proves great respect should be shown to the staff that are employed who have an in depth knowledge of child development and a genuine interest in supporting and educating each child.

To have your child in a centre where you see the staff are fluid and flexible in their approach and look to explore and support all means in growth and development, whether this be through parental discussion, educational training, attending various forums and conferences and seeking secondary consult, I feel assured that upon leaving my son he will have a fantastic 8 hour day. His day will be filled with various educational activities, materials and mediums and general healthy role modelling.

As I and my husband choose to work I feel safe knowing my most prized possession is with people whom I respect. His personality is largely due to the time each individual has invested in him and I am thankful.

Celeste Morath

Our son attends a community managed not for profit service.

Knowing our son Sidney is being cared for, happy and learning is everything to us. It was a big decision for us to have him in daycare and we were so very happy when he was accepted into East West Childcare because we understood the detail of care this facility runs. Going to work and knowing he is happy, safe and developing as he should be gives our family an enormous balance on so many different levels; personal, emotional, financial. An unexpected benefit; the detail of care this facility provides leaves us feeling more connected to our own community.

We highly value the education and care our child receives.

Knowing that he is in a high quality environment supports both of us to participate in the workforce.

We are not prepared to compromise the health, safety, well-being or learning and development of our son. The importance of early learning should not be compromised under the guise of affordability.

We implore the government;

- Do not water down the standards of education and care for children under 3 years. Keep the current requirements for 50% of educators working with children under 3 to hold a Diploma level or higher qualification. Qualifications of educators are a vital element of high quality education and care.
- Do not remove eligibility of not for profit providers to payroll tax - this will lead to significant fee increases and may affect the viability of our service
- Do not allow services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios (by averaging over a day or a week)
- Do not simplify the National Quality Standards – quality matters for our child
- Do not introduce funding arrangements that result in reduced access and financial support for vulnerable families and children and for families in crisis.

Rena Turner

I am a parent of a child being cared for in a community managed not for profit service. I am deeply concerned that the draft report has made recommendations that affect the quality of care delivered in these services. I am also deeply concerned that some recommendations will impact on fees, access and financial support for many families including vulnerable families and children. While our family have found access to high quality community managed not for profit child care it did prove to be difficult to find. It should not be difficult and access to quality services should be available to all families seeking child care.

I believe it is essential to keep the current requirements for at least 50% of educators working with children aged birth to 36 months to hold a Diploma level qualification or higher.

I believe current payroll tax-exemptions and Fringe Benefit Tax Exemptions for Not for Profit Providers of education and care should remain in place.

I believe services should not be allowed to operate temporarily with staffing levels below required ratios (by averaging over a day or a week).

I believe the National Quality Standards are important and should not be simplified.

I believe funding arrangements should be made that increase access and financial support for vulnerable families and children and for families in crisis.

I believe preschools should remain under the scope of the National Quality Framework.

I strongly believe that staff that are more highly qualified are able to provide better care. Centres that employ more highly qualified educators are able to play an important role in supporting families by sharing advice and information when needed. They not only make considered decisions in their planning of the program to ensure the health and safety of children but they also create a supportive learning environment in which our children can explore and connect and grow emotionally, socially and physically. Highly qualified staff make informed decisions about their interactions with children. They engage with children and reflect and review their interactions and those of the child. They understand how their interactions impact on a child in creating healthy attachments, providing security and offering opportunities for developing independence, creativity and resilience. I think the quality of nurturing interactions that is based on an understanding of child development and self reflection are far higher than the nurturing that is based on a persons' own parenting or baby sitting experiences coupled with a certificate.

I am grateful everyday for the high quality of care offered at East West. The staff at East West consistently manage issues such as separation anxiety at drop off with confidence and care because they are educated in child development and skilled in meeting the needs of the child. This knowledge is shared amongst all staff working there and so a shared philosophy has developed and consistency is achieved amongst all staff. The staff also play an important role in supporting our family by creating community connections and sharing information relating to child development and children's services.

In helping our child to form friendships with his peers they recognised that supporting his language was key to understanding his relationships. They talked to him about who he played with during the day and how he played, reminding him of the interactions he shared with others. They also addressed the children's emotional development by supporting children's use of language to communicate feelings. They employed the use of photographs

of children's faces which children could move around a display identifying how they felt. This was placed in a location that children could access and share the conversation with their families on arrival and with staff throughout the day. This was designed to help children understand and manage their feelings and valuable information about the purpose of the display was communicated to families.

I am also absolutely against the idea that services could temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios. Not only are staffing ratios vital in ensuring the safety of children in care, they are important in ensuring that staff moral is high and that each staff member is properly supported in carrying out their role. Our childcare educators deserve optimum working conditions that allow them to provide the best care that they can give.

There is still a real demand for quality community based child care in our area. Regrettably our first child was cared for in a private centre because waiting lists for childcare elsewhere were longer than two years. The centre did not have enough staff to provide a level of care that was supportive and safe. Staff were not highly qualified and staff moral was low. Interactions with children were inconsistent and not always warm and nurturing, sometimes far from it. Children were not supported in learning to play safely alongside one another. Rooms were kept dark and overheated. As a result of the poor quality of care I was anxious about leaving my child there and ultimately unable to continue to work. In my search for child care I visited a number of privately run centres and was witness to a number of situations that were alarmingly unsafe including a child being left alone in a high chair while a staff member went to another building to get some food leaving several crawling babies unsupervised in the room at the same time. I believe that there is no place for profiting on the care of our children without compromising on quality and all funding decisions should be in support of not for profit community and council operated centres.

Judy Weber

Our priority for our son is always his emotional, physical and intellectual well being. We value high quality child care that maintains good staff to child ratios with highly qualified teachers. This enables our son to have the best possible start in life, provides the support for all of us as a family and allows both myself and my partner peace of mind for our son's welfare whilst we are at work.

When our child was born my partner and I made the decision to only work part time for the first year so that our son could remain at home with us full time. We felt this was the most beneficial for him at this time and for us in getting to know him and his needs. We have always understood and appreciated that this a luxury few families can have.

However after the first year it became necessary for us both to increase our working hours for financial reasons. We then began looking for childcare on a part time weekly basis. From the beginning of our search our goals were always to find childcare that was not only safe and secure, but nurturing and challenging for our son.

His initial childcare was safe and secure, the staff were gentle and loving, however we found that he lacked the intellectual stimulation, the education that he needed. With a minimal ratio of staff to children and only the base amount of structured teaching we found our son began to fall through the cracks, becoming listless and emotionally withdrawn after his days at the childcare.

Finally our son asked to leave his childcare.

Talking to other people from the community we heard again and again of the wonderful inspiring atmosphere at East West Childcare. Contacting them we found them to be encouraging and supportive.

Once our son began attending East West we saw positive changes in his emotional and intellectual states. In East West we have found a childcare that has a high ratio of well educated and experienced teachers that have the time and knowledge to create a safe and supportive environment to assist our son to be the best and happiest person he can be. We are confident that he is getting the best quality pre-school education as we can see our son flourishing. This is further enhanced by a high level of open communication and support from the staff to us as parents, meaning we are able to work on our son's well being together in a coordinated and cohesive way. East West Childcare supports and develops our son's social interactions, his physical abilities, his emotional well being, and his cognitive development through a carefully considered programme of activities and routines. Going forward we confident that because of the high level of quality and educated care he's received our well rounded son is ready to transition to school next year.

Jode Cowie

I am the parent of a 3-year old child who attends long day care at EastWest childcare in Fitzroy, Victoria. I have read the Australian Productivity Commission's draft report on childcare and early childhood learning and make the following submission.

I am a young professional in the early stages of my career in a competitive industry. My current job requires that I divide my time working in Melbourne and interstate. My wife is a full-time student in a demanding professional degree, with a view also to entering a highly competitive workforce. We live in Fitzroy, Victoria; but our respective families are interstate and overseas. Childcare is critical in providing our child with high quality care and education, while allowing my wife and I to enter and remain in, respectively, the workforce.

A number of essential elements have (fortunately) been met which allow us to obtain childcare. First: funding support. If we did not receive the current level of childcare benefit and rebate we would not be able to meet the costs of childcare. As it is, but only just, my income enables me to support my wife as she completes her studies. Second: availability. We applied to over twenty childcare centres, at considerable expense, and to some over a year in advance, without any assurance of an offer. We received only two offers before the time when care was needed (other offers did come, but too late). And of those two offers only one was practicable, because of the third element: location. It is essential that our childcare centre is located, as it is, near to where we live because, amongst other reasons, of the fourth element: opening hours. My working hours do not meet with childcare opening hours. My wife's ideal hours would not either, and she often skips university contact hours so that she can meet opening hours.

Each of the above elements is necessary. But other elements are ultimately more important to us. Principally, our childcare centre provides a high level of care and education to our child. The number of children at the centre is low and it has an excellent education programme. Each of the teachers is highly qualified and experienced, but also genuinely caring, engaged and supportive of each child and each family. And the teachers share a similar outlook to us. That gives us confidence that our child is not only receiving a high level of education and care, but that she is receiving care of a quality and content which is consistent with what we offer her in our own

home. That is facilitated by communication between the teachers and families about each child's needs, and about the child's life inside and outside childcare. Finally, and in furtherance of the location element already identified, the majority of teachers and other families are members of our local community. We rely upon our local community in Fitzroy for support and friendship, and it is important to us that our child, and my wife and I, develop strong bonds with other children and families in our neighbourhood, and that we experience a wider community engagement.

Given my family's circumstances, I welcome recommendations in the Commission's draft report which would simplify but maintain (if not increase) the level of funding support, and which would help to expand the availability of childcare services. But I do not welcome recommendations which would see those developments come at a cost to the quality of care, by affecting teacher : child ratios, the requisite qualifications and checks for teachers and appropriate teacher remuneration.

Sincerely,

Rudi Kruse

**RE: Childcare Productivity Commission submission**

One of our key issues of concern is that the draft Report recommends that all educators working with children aged birth to 36 months are only required to hold a Certificate III level qualification (Draft Recommendation 7.2). Preschool/child care is a vital part of our children's' development. It is imperative that we provide for children the best quality care and this means allocating Diploma trained (or above) educators to care for our children. At our childcare centre, which employs educators with diplomas and above, the impact of such qualifications on our children's' development has been significant. We were previously with a child care centre that did not have the same qualified staff and we felt that our children were not being looked after as well as they could be.

As a qualified workplace trainers, we understand the competency levels that are being recommended in Draft Recommendation 7.2. It's simply not good enough.

When you hand over the education and care of your child to someone else, you are wishing for the best for their care. When we are at work, we want to know that our children are well looked after and thriving. I am on the committee at my children's' childcare centre. I know how much work these teachers put in to their role on a daily basis. Recommending that staff need only possess a Certificate III undermines the valuable work they do and the pay scale they deserve.

The Recommendation 7.5 of the draft report that recommends allowing services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios sets a dangerous precedent for the degradation of care. It impacts on the education of the children on that particular day and raises serious questions around staff OH&S. These are not adequate working conditions for people entrusted with the care and education of our most vulnerable citizens.

Draft Recommendation 12.4 recommends families who do not meet an activity test of 24 hours of work, study or training per fortnight will not be able to access any subsidised child care. This impact on low-income families is very troubling. The affluent will always be able to provide childcare, whether publically or privately. Childcare should be a right for all people not just those who can afford it.

If the commission is so worried about economics and how to sustain/expand child care perhaps it would be better to look at other strategies besides dumbing down and or stretching an already stressed sector. The funds from the proposed parental leave scheme could easily be redirected into childcare subsidy. Surely it makes sense to support women staying in the work force (providing affordable quality child care) rather than pay to take them out of it (parental leave scheme).

Regards,

Camilla Hannan & Van Sowerwine

As someone who knew very little about children, living far away from my extended family, the early days of having a child were a very uncertain, tentative time. I had no real advice or concept of needing to get my daughter onto waiting lists for childcare and no real idea how I was going to manage to get back to work. With no family to provide support and no friends who had children, I really felt as though I just muddled through the first year.

Once I got a handle on getting on the wait lists, I had even less idea about how to get back to work as the projected wait time at all my local day care centres was well over a year from the date I applied (my daughter was about 8 months old). I was incredibly fortunate to meet a teacher from East West at my local cafe. In fact, my daughter met her. Ruth Harper had a conversation with my 8 month old daughter for about 10 minutes before actually introducing herself to me and my companion. We were both stunned at the interaction that we had just seen. At Ruth's insistence I went to visit East West with my daughter. I will never forget that visit. I sat in the garden and watched a small group of children discussing Archimedes theory of displacement and conducting experiments about floating objects. Another group of girls and boys - all ages - worked together to work out how to move the gym mats up to the jungle gym. The teachers spoke clearly, kindly and respectfully to the children - no baby talk. The teachers watched the children making discoveries and saw opportunities to extend them into further areas - gently directing their learning. My daughter was invited to sit with the kids for lunch - outside in the shade that day. The children all fed themselves, talked about what they were eating, what they had been doing. I was amazed and obviously I joined the waiting list.

My daughter attended another centre 2 days a week for about 4 months. I needed assistance at that stage as I was finding it an incredible struggle to meet her needs in terms of social interaction, structuring our days, sleep, eating, diversity of play activities and learning opportunities. To that end, it was incredibly valuable to me to be able to use 2 days of long day care as I am not sure if I would have managed without it. When my daughter was about 18 months old, we were offered a place at East West. The impact of the environment and the high quality of the staff on Lily-Jane was dramatic. Her vocabulary increased by about 30 words within the first week. She spontaneously offered 'please' and 'thank you'. She became more experimental but less destructive, more confident with movement to music and simply more confident overall.

Our experience with East West goes far beyond the educational needs of our children. For myself and my husband it has provided a real heart to our community. We have met a lot of our immediate neighbours here, have developed a support and social network where we are able to provide other families with help and ask for help in return. The staff at East West have also become part of this support network for us providing advice on sleep, behaviour, kinder and school options as well as just lending an ear when we have needed help that traditionally would be sought from our parents. The staff have been knowledgeable, engaged and caring from the moment we began attending and have made our lives both in the workforce and at home, immeasurably better.

I am happy to have my children at East West. I can confidently leave them in their care while I am at work and know that their needs are being met 100%, that they are in a warm and loving environment and that they are being educated and extended at the same time.

There is no doubt in my mind that I would be unable to return to work if the standard of care was compromised. I simply couldn't do my job adequately if I were worried about my children and I would sacrifice our family income to maintain standards for our children. It is worth pointing out that there is no way that I could provide as rich an experience for my children as they receive from attending East West three days a week. It is not an area that should be up for debate - families and children deserve to have quality, affordable care.

Sincerely,  
Hannah Marshall

We are parents of 20 month old twins. Both my husband and I run our own seperate businesses. Both twins were put on every list in our suburb as well as surrounding suburbs. We paid fees to be on almost every waiting list and all of these fees times two. Most centres told us we would be waiting two years to receive even one place. The issue with twins is you may be offered a place but then you cannot just send one child, you have to give up that one place until two places become avail at the same time.

I was desperate to return to work as after 18 months having my business on hold (unable to work during the pregnancy) it was in danger of failing. I was in a position where the only thing stopping me from returning to work was not having positions at daycare. For us, having two children in long daycare is expensive, I do not take a wage for I am building up my own business. This means we are both working but the family is supported on one wage. This means we can only afford to send our kids two days a week. If it was less expensive I may be able to work more.

We received 2x places at East West which was a miracle for us not only because of the things above, but they are known within the area for being the best centre to care for your children. They were so accomodating to us and the level of care my children receive is wonderful. They work tirelessly meeting the needs of the children and they're families and it was eye opening for me to learn the level of fundraising needed to sustain the centre.

Our girls took a long time to adjust and we felt very supported by all the carers (and still do) through this transition. We are surprised every evening that they return home with new words and they have developed at such a rapid rate which I attribute directly to the care and education they receive there. It is obvious they are being exposed to the education and activities the older children are learning at the centre.

If we did not receive the places at East West when we did, My business would have definitely ceased running and I would have been forced to stay home as a full time mum. We would not have been able to afford a nanny. I also think developmentally and socially I would not have met my children's needs at home. I think if they were at home until kindergarten, they would not adapt to the kindergarten environment well at all.

Anna Martino & Joel Priestland

I am the mother of a two year old daughter in a community managed not for profit child care service. I value the Early Childhood Educators and I value my child's safety and development. I am totally against the proposed changes regarding the educational standards of the ELC staff. I believe that at least 50% of the staff should have a Diploma qualification or higher, to give all the children the best start to life.

Putting my child into high quality childcare has given me the opportunity to return back to the workforce, helping me progress in my senior-level career and contribute to society. I am confident to do this knowing that my child receives quality care from experienced, well trained staff. I shudder to think of what may happen if people who are not adequately qualified in best practice care and engagement with children.

Safety is my number one concern. If these people are treating childcare as a casual job, rather than a career, my concern is that they will treat their role too casually, not properly looking out for children's safety and wellbeing. My next concern is the development of my child's brain and the modeling of good behavior from well-educated adults. I am not at all convinced that people who do not have a Diploma or higher have the training, experience, confidence or the initiative to properly engage with the children at such an important stage in their brain development. Even worse, some of these people may be poor role models for the children, not because they are bad people, but because they may not know any better as they have not been trained in best practice care. We have all come across such well-meaning people in our day to day life and sought to limit their time with our children. For these reasons, I support a nationally recognised working with children check up on all staff at childcare centres.

I am concerned that this proposed change also undervalues childcarers and their careers. If the 50% ratio is dropped, the centres will be flooded with low qualified (and cheap) labour that I feel undermines the credentials and experience of the more qualified staff. We need to be supporting these valuable people and understand the contribution they are making to very young children's development. I have first hand experience of my 2 year old daughter coming home and telling me of a new word or activity that she learned that day and it makes me feel a lot less guilty about putting her in care. If these people did not feel valued or rewarded in their careers, there may well be a brain drain in the whole sector, which would be very detrimental for children's outcomes in the long term. If the people at my child's centre were dull, uninspiring and constantly-changing casual workers, I'd take her out and leave the workforce to care for her. Having the security of strong relationships and familiarity with the staff is clearly vital to my daughter's development and happiness. I fear that other children will miss out on this clear benefit if the proposed changes take place.

Lastly, the changes in the ratio of staff caring for under 3s horrifies me. As a mother of a little girl, I have seen first hand the violent and unsociable behavior exhibited by some children (possibly with poor role models in their life) and am reassured by the fact that there is an appropriate number of trained and caring staff to look out for the smaller children and correct unacceptable behaviour.

A couple of times, children have been sick with contagious viruses, such as Rubella at the centre and the attentive staff quickly spotted this and dealt with it, avoiding an outbreak. I am very concerned that less staff per child would mean that the children will not be cared for as well and this could lead to serious outbreaks of infectious diseases and whole centres being shut down for a week. Especially with vaccine levels dropping.

Please reconsider these proposed changes as I feel that rather than valuing childcare and the vital role educated role models play in children's development, it is McDonaldisifying the whole sector. I completely support more funding and flexibility in childcare to help mothers and fathers return to the workforce, but believe that this could be achieved by scrapping the proposed Paid Parental Leave Scheme and diverting funds to support the current childcare framework.

Romani Mieszkowski

## Response to Draft report into Childcare and Early Learning

I thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the current inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

I am the parent (mother) of three young children, now aged 12,10 and 4, and have a broad experience over the past decade of a range of early childhood care and learning facilities, including family day care, occasional care, after school care and early learning care.

### Key points

- The access to learning for children between 0-3 should not be sacrificed for cost savings;
- Deemed cost is a dangerous measure to base rebates or payments on and will not reflect the true cost to families
- Access to early learning is essential to enable return to work and therefore critical to the ability of the parent to be productive.

**Reducing the qualifications of those caring for under 3s:** I would like to strongly oppose the **Draft recommendation 7.2** to reduce the qualifications of those with the care of children under 3 years of age and provide my views (**information request 7.1**) on the anticipated outcome of this action.

I have some experience of the impact of reduced ratios and qualifications on the care of young children as both my elder boys were in care between 2004-2007 prior to the introduction of the current 1:4 ratio for this age group and in facilities where young, certificate only or student staff were used to reduce costs.

This was a traumatic period for both myself and particularly my younger son, who as a result of a takeover of the local family-run centre in Moonee Ponds, ended up in a facility run by the then expanding ABC Learning (for profit centre). The combination of small children who have a much higher need for one on one attention, the lower staffing ratios and the inexperience of staff was very upsetting and added tremendously to the guilt I felt at returning to work and to my ability to work while in a state of anxiety over my son's care. The inexperienced/young staff simply did not have the knowledge, capacity, confidence and maturity to manage the very particular needs of this young age group, or engage them and frequently seemed completely unable to cope. Staff were remote and formal in their dealings with the children, lacking warmth and engagement. There was no sense of commitment and passion in the job, but rather a feeling that these were kids fresh out of school who had taken the job because they thought babies would be cute and had found themselves utterly out of their depth. Sick leave was high, so this impacted on continuity for the children. Rooms were clinical and engagement with children was limited to putting them in front of a box of toys, or watching them from the sidelines. It was common to walk into a room with children aimlessly drifting about, several children crying, babies lying on their backs unattended or needing noses wiped while the one or two frazzled-looking staff changed nappies or dealt with arriving parents. It felt like children were being parked out of the way until they were collected again, with staff merely keeping an eye on them from a distance. Children were by necessity left to their own devices. My son cried hysterically every time I left him and I found him flat and listless and tired at the end of the day when I collected him. Heartbreaking.

By extreme contrast, our youngest child currently attends the exceptional community-run, not-for-profit, East West Early Learning centre in Fitzroy, which began operating on or above the current child : staff ratios for this age group well ahead of their introduction. Of the 11 staff working there, eight are diploma qualified or higher and length of employment averages 11.5years. This is a centre where everywhere you look kids are enthusiastically grouped around an engaged and experienced adult exploring colour, or shape, dance, or imaginative play – you can see the joy of discovery on their face. This is not just pulling a jigsaw or lego out of a box. Activities, drawn from staff experience and training of age requirements and learning stages, are

planned and executed with discovery and education in mind. The high staff to child ratio, with frequently 6 adults visible across a small centre that holds 25, means if a child is not interested in a particular activity, there is someone at hand to engage him or her in something else. Staff are warm and engaging with the children, drawing them into the activities. They seem confident and in control. You can plainly see that the children feel safe and at home and cared for. Spaces around the room are reinvented on a daily basis creating a never-ending sense of discovery. The feeling is of passionate staff, working together as a team to do a job that they love, where children are not simply being 'parked' but are being given the most precious gift of all – learning. These people are wonderful and their happy camaraderie and enthusiasm for their charges makes it a very special place. My daughter never wants to leave, is full of stories of what she did, is articulate and creative and confident. Attending East West makes us both happy.

Scarred as I am by the ABC Learning experience, I regard it as a very retrograde and dangerous step to wind back the ratios of staff to children in this age group and reduce the requirement for their qualifications.

I passionately disagree with the idea that younger children require less experienced care. If anything, it is this age group of 0-3 that requires the most experienced care as they are not as self sufficient, or able to find their own play, and are just reaching out to learn. They are like sponges, reaching out for so many new experiences and moving on to the next one so quickly. They are highly emotional and easily frustrated and very high maintenance. It takes lots of experience and patience to manage and direct this energy and emotion and inquisitiveness. But everything they see or grasp is a voyage of discovery and learning. If this burgeoning inquisitiveness is met with indifference or a lack of experienced care, it could have a lifetime impact on their keenness to learn and their confidence as learners. Young children need experienced encouragement and a fostering of that inquisitiveness at this age. Properly trained and experienced teachers, who are well supported, are best placed to provide this.

We should not be trading off the welfare of children for cost. Our children are our future and the better they are as learners the better that future will be. Engaged children will be engaged employees of the future and give back in spades in terms of productivity and reduced dependence on welfare. My children are the most precious things in my life and I would happily pay MORE to have my daughter cared for and educated in the way she currently is.

**Deeming costs (Recommendation 12.4):** I strongly oppose the idea we could use a Medicare model of deemed costs to assess childcare costs. As we know with Medicare, this leaves a gap of often close to 50pc between what the Government 'deems' the cost is and what is actually paid. Government deemed medical cost figures continually lag behind reality and there is every reason to fear that they would do so in the childcare industry also.

Furthermore I fear this would penalize centres which employee qualified, and more costly teachers and would act as a deterrent to them to do so as it would force them to charge more than the deemed fee.

In this era of computerized record keeping, the Government is well able to collect accurate records of fees paid and reimburse. Stay away from deemed fees.

I support the proposal to means test the benefits (although I will certainly lose a proportion of my rebate as a result). Assistance should be targeted to those who need it most.

**Access to childcare essential for parental return to work:** It is essential that any review of the productivity of the Childcare and Early Learning industry also considers the broader impact on the productivity of those of us who use or wish to use the industry.

Returning to work post children is extremely challenging and requires finding a perfect alignment of childcare, parental support and an employer prepared to offer flexible working arrangements. If that happens to be in a field you are experienced in and want to pursue, that is a bonus. (In my view security of employment/flexibility to return after having children is

infinitely more important than a few weeks of parental pay.)

Due to long waiting lists at local child care centres after the birth of my daughter in 2010 I was forced to use a mix of family-day care and occasional care. Family day care was effectively twice as expensive as elsewhere as the provider I used was registered, but did not see the point in going through the approval process (nothing in it for her as she did not get any financial advantage and had plenty of children regardless) so I was unable to access the rebate. I had no other option, so to work, I had to pay unrebated fees until I was fortunate enough to be offered a place at East West Early Learning centre.

As I have been unable to find a job I can do part time on a permanent basis since having my third child, I work as a freelance media consultant, running my own business from home. It is impossible for me to work from home with small children at hand. My ability to be productive, contribute to the economy and pay taxes is entirely dependant on the fact I have my daughter in care at East West.

Attending East West facilitates my productivity as I am able to seek and undertake work, confident that I can give it my full attention and commitment to my business as my child is being cared for and educated in a supportive, nurturing and engaging environment, whereby she is, if anything learning MORE than she would in my care.

#### Related observations

- Rebating childcare fees does not make childcare more affordable to parents, it simply leads to increased fees due to a tolerance for fee rises up to the old price paid.
- Payments direct to centres don't necessarily make for reduced fees
- Chicken before the egg – It is impossible to apply for work without childcare locked in, yet you need to satisfy the work test to get rebates – this unnecessarily penalizes people trying to return to work.

I returned to permanent part time employment after my first child in 2003 (pre rebate) and second child in 2005 (post rebate). The escalation of fees in the wake of the introduction of the rebate was dramatic and far outstripped inflation. Whereas we paid around \$55 a day in 2003, it jumped sharply into the \$80s after the introduction of the rebate and we are now paying \$100 a day. I firmly believe a significant part of this increase has been due to centres taking advantage of the tolerance for fee increases up to the level parents were paying before. There has to be a better model for reducing the cost to parents.

A note on our experience of the **preschool payments**. Our elder boys attended an Early Learning Centre (not East West) where initially the funded pre school places were a little cheaper than the 3-year-old places. Then the centre argued that they needed that money for their programmes and just put the fees up to the same level as the 'unfunded' places. Then they said the 3-year-olds should actually pay more because they could fill the centre with 'funded' four year olds and be financially better off, and so it goes...

I would like to raise an issue with the eligibility for childcare benefits and rebates resting on the **work/study test**. As highlighted above, it is impossible to return to work until childcare is locked in. Only then can you begin to look for work. Therefore there is a period when you may not be working, but of necessity paying childcare. It unreasonably penalizes the person trying to find work if they do not qualify for the rebate until they find work. It also acts against the self employed/own business, such as myself, where I may have gaps between work, but am constantly trying to find new work. I cannot cancel my childcare between jobs and do not know when I will secure the next contract. Some provision for self employed, or actively looking for work should be included within this criteria.

Alison Barber

To whom it may concern:

I have been a parent at East West Community childcare for four years (with two sons) and look forward to continuing to be a part of the community it has created for years to come (with my youngest daughter). From the very beginning my experience has been positive, enriching, fulfilling and reflective. Our children's carers have been motivated, proactive, thorough, dedicated, compassionate, interested and just beautiful. Raising children is obviously constantly evolving and challenging. I remember thinking my first child wouldn't ever need childcare as he would clearly just stay with me however; when introduced to East West I realised what an invaluable experience for both parents and children it was and continues to be. I observed my shy little boy making friends, trying new art forms and games, playing, learning about and making fresh food, developing his language and resilience, venturing out on excursions without his mum and building his confidence ready to make the transition to kindergarten and now school.

As busy parents rushing in and out we are always given feedback from the day, made aware of concerns with behaviour or friendships and given time to discuss anything we in turn were ever concerned about. My second son started at East West just before he turned 2. From 18 months it had been noted and explored that he was struggling with his language. Not only did our amazing teachers/carers work with him one on one to help him with communication skills but they researched all possible programs available and through extensive reports and enquiry secured funding through Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) to ensure extra staff could be made available to give my son ongoing one on one time.

It is invaluable that these difficulties were observed and addressed in my son before he turned three. It is a highly significant age where his lack of language was and could still be in danger of him socially isolating himself and taking those habits into his early schooling years. If staff numbers had decreased or were of lower skill levels there is no way our childcare educators would have had the time to give my son such focus and then deal directly with his paediatrician, speech therapist and early intervention case worker.

It is paramount to the success of generations now and to come that early education is available at this continued high level. Without this environment many issues in our small people will be missed and absorbed into the confusion of them starting school where a young child will be faced with so many new challenges. Knowing my children were in such a professional yet nurturing environment enabled me the confidence to return to the workforce, engage in extra study and care for my new baby when she arrived this year. It would be unacceptable to compromise on any of these standards. All research and practice lead to the understanding of the importance of a child's development in their early years and how essential this development is to later outcomes in life. It is therefore logical and essential that mandatory qualifications for this age bracket are maintained together with significant staffing ratios to ensure a safe, productive environment.

Finally, it is most important to note that even at reasonable childcare fee costs, which many families would be happy to pay more because of our excellent educators; we live in a community where many families face considerable hardships. One of the most enriching aspects of East West is it's mixture of cultures and socio economic backgrounds where children learn to broaden their human experience instead of being forced to conform to a certain 'type'! Threatening to remove these subsidies will only serve to isolate sections of our community further which has short and long term effects for society as a whole. We have to ask ourselves what do we want for our children's future and our society as they are inextricably linked. Early education is the beginning of this essential human journey.

I cannot speak highly enough of the team at East West. I am very grateful for their continued friendship, understanding and patience that my family have been afforded. I would be more than willing to speak further and publicly on these incredibly important issues and on behalf of our most excellent educators and carers.

Yours Sincerely,  
Kate Jones

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Susan Foley and I'm a working mother with 2 children. Frances is 3 and is currently at East West Childcare Co-op and my 6 year old son, Rudy, is enjoying Prep having attended childcare and kindergarten from the age of 8 months.

I'm sure my situation is similar to many, my husband and I work full time. Despite several efforts, we are unable to work in a part time capacity and, are unable to keep up financially on one wage. As such, it's extremely important to us to know that our children are being cared for with as much sense of responsibility, concern and fun as we would care for them should we have the choice. This is why, when we moved to the area, we wanted our children to attend East West. More than just child-minding, the carers at East West play an amazingly active role in our children's lives, I really believe they have helped raise and educate my children to be happy, confident and decent kids today.

This is why I write this letter, there have been some decisions made by your Productivity Commission that really concern me. In fact, I can only imagine the additional level of stress they will bring to our home should they be enforced.

My key areas for concern include:

- **The lowering of qualifications of carers of children under 3.**  
I don't understand why the mind and well-being isn't just as important at this age. Isn't this an age that is so crucial to the development of the child, intellectually and socially? As such, shouldn't this role be weighted more importantly and therefore require more than a babysitters training?
- **The removal of pay roll tax exemptions and FBT exemptions for our centre (a not-for-profit).**  
East West is very much community run, we rely on the support of grants but also, fundraising, the fees and the community around us. In return, East West supports the community back, and for those children in more challenging situations financially. I believe community is important and want my children to believe this too. This recommendation would seriously effect East West and our ability to run financially – the effect could be very, disastrous.
- **I am also concerned by the recommendation to remove Preschool from the National Quality Framework.**  
Last year my son attended Kindergarten 3 days a week and then East West the other days. For me it was important for him to stay connected to East West plus I really valued their stimulating activities for him. Kinder was great but, especially in the early months, it was sometimes isolating. And they weren't really able to get to know him. East West was able to play a more familiar role while still also being aware of the kinder program and where he needed to be.

I'm sure you receive many letters like this, but as I mentioned earlier that my son is enjoying prep this year. He was a shy sensitive child but he is absolutely thriving at school and I really believe that is partly due to the care, stimulation and attention he received in his earlier years. These are important years, they are about instilling confidence in a child and getting them prepared for the bigger world (well, school) and not all of us can be with our children during the day to be involved as much as we'd like. Please seriously consider some of the recommendations, as outlined; some could make a very damaging difference.

Yours Sincerely

Susan Foley

I write in support of the submission made to you by East West Childcare (Early Learning) Association in response to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report into Childcare and early Childhood Learning.

My son attends East West Childcare three days a week, enabling both myself (working for a GBE) and my husband (operating a small business) to continue to contribute to the workforce and support our family. While this has been invaluable for us, the most important contribution East West has made to our family is their genuine care and concern for our son and their identification of some challenges that he faces, enabling us to address these early and to therefore give this future little citizen the best possible start to life.

I believe, were a number of the current Recommendations of the Commissions' Draft Report implemented, the ability of places such as East West to make the important and valuable contribution referred to above, would be placed in jeopardy. In particular, I refer to the following Recommendations that give me the greatest concern.

**Allowing services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below the required ratios (by averaging over a day or week)**

The child:staff ratio at East West was one of the primary reasons we chose to place our son in their care, taking this information in part from the current NQF, which East West has exceeded since 2011. In my observation, this ratio has played a key part in enabling East West to first identify that our son may have been facing some personal challenges (with each carer having a greater capacity to genuinely get to know and observe the children) and secondly, to give him a level of attention that begins to address some of the concerns they identified.

We initially moved our child from a previous Centre because we noticed that despite compliance with the existing ratio, there were many times where the number of children to carers seemed to overwhelm those in his original centre. Certainly, there was a more limited capacity to genuinely spend time with the children due to the demands on the carer's attention. I say this not as a mother concerned about her son not getting enough attention, but as one who is also conscious that at times he may draw attention away from others because he has needed some additional support.

I am genuinely concerned that should services be temporarily permitted to operate with staffing levels below the required ratios, the fantastic work that carers do may be comprised. Certainly, I would question whether my son's challenges would be identified so quickly in such an environment and whether he could be given the support he sometimes requires, without compromising the care of himself and others. For that reason, I would urge the Commission not to implement this Recommendation.

**Requiring educators working with children under 3 to only hold a certificate III level qualification**

It is the level of experience and knowledge held by those at East West that I consider plays a key role in their ability to identify and seek to address concerns that they may have regarding those in their care. With 8 staff diploma or higher qualified, they have been experienced enough to approach my husband and I with credibility and confidence and to help us navigate a path that ensures our son is given the best support possible to set him up for life.

As noted in their submission, neuroscientists have found that the first three years of life are the period of the most rapid brain growth, containing periods for optimal learning in

many areas. Were our son, and indeed all children in care, not in the care of those most qualified to support, nurture and guide them during this time, then we risk the opportunity to maximise their potential and their potential contribution to our society. Certainly, I would be concerned that my son would have been disadvantaged were he not fortunate to be in a centre with such qualified and experienced staff. Rather, I imagine that the opportunity to help him with his challenges would not have been taken so early and have potentially negatively impacted on his ability to develop into what we hope will one day be a caring, intelligent, productive adult.

It is natural that we, and indeed East West (as they have stated) want to see our son thrive socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively, therefore the high qualified care and education they provide him is of vital importance. The ability to provide this highly qualified care should not just be important to me as a parent, but also to our government, as it ensures our future – our young – are given the best possible start at becoming intelligent, compassionate, socially aware, engaged future contributors to our society. For these reasons, I would urge the Commission not to implement this Recommendation.

**Simplifying the NQS and identifying standards or elements that can be removed or altered while maintaining quality**

The NQS as presently drafted has been an important part in ensuring that children receive the most appropriate, highly qualified, care possible, holding providers to be accountable for meeting the standards we consider best supports children in their ongoing development. Certainly it has played a key role for our family in selecting care and giving us added confidence that the centre we select to send our son to is one that is going to give him the best care. Simplifying and watering down those standards puts at risk the ability to ensure that high quality care is provided across the board and seeks to make judgements as to which elements are more important than others. For this reason and those submitted by East West, I would urge the Commission not to implement this Recommendation.

**In support of East West's Submission, I would also urge the Commission not to implement its Recommendations regarding:**

- Removal of pre schools from the scope of the NQF
- Removal of eligibility of not for profit providers to payroll tax and FBT exemptions

Ruth Goonan

Our child attends a community run childcare centre. We made the decision to send our child to this centre because we value the high quality education and care our two-year old son receives at East West Child Care Association.

We know this environment guarantees the absolute best care and attention our child requires at this most crucial age in the support of his development.

The current National Quality Standards provide the environment necessary for the health, safety and wellbeing that young children require.

The existing staffing level ratios are fundamental to the provision of an educational environment, which affords a foundation for the social, emotional and physical development of our son, guaranteeing him the best start in life.

The National Quality Standards currently in place maintain access and financial support for all families regardless of their socio economic status. Access to high quality childcare must be based on principles of equity, and it is a measure of our society that education is not based on postcode or ability to pay.

Sally Hussey & Chris Jones

To Whomever It May Concern,

I am an Australian mother of two boys, aged 3 and 5 years, both in their final years of early childhood care and learning. My sons have had the good fortune to experience an Australian childcare environment with quality of care and education that puts them in excellent stead for their Australian kindergarten and school years ahead. Therefore it is not on their behalf that I write this letter; I am instead compelled to write on behalf of future Australian children who stand to benefit, as my boys have, from ongoing outstanding quality of early childhood care and learning within Australia.

I urge the Productivity Commission to uphold, and further increase, a standard within the NQF that Australia can continue to be proud of on a local and world scale, and in doing so recognize the broader benefit of what this standard provides for the Australian community and society as a whole: socially adept, emotionally developed and instinctive, cognitive early learners and preschoolers; stimulated, dedicated and highly sought after early childhood staff; emotionally and financially supported parents, empowered to contribute and thrive within Australia's working sector while knowing their children, from young yet critical early-learning ages, are receiving a quality of care uncompromised by the environment within which they are placed to receive such care.

The NQF can only be upheld with the ongoing support of its present-day framework, including current staff to child ratios (especially for children under three years) and the employment of staff highly trained in early childhood development and education. Most critically, however, the standard of the NQF should be further elevated by the implementation of recommendations from the Productivity Commission, specifically ongoing funding by the Australian Government of universal access to 15 hours of preschool, extending the scope of the NQF to include all centre and home based services receiving Australian Government assistance, and increased investment in subsidies for low income families.

As stated, I am one of the more fortunate Australian parents whose children have benefited from the current, outstanding NQF in place for early childhood care and education. I urge the Australian Government not to disallow these benefits for future Australian parents and children, and rather to strive for an ever-increasingly productive, higher benchmark for current and future standards, by way of the Productivity Commission.

Sincerely,

Anna McLeish

As a parent with two children (4 & 2 yrs) at East West, I cannot stress enough the importance of the National Quality Framework and a quality Early Learning environment. What it ensures is that children get both a great start on their learning journey towards school and life, and also that parents are supported by highly qualified teachers to be well balanced and fully able to participate in the workforce.

If it were not for the highly qualified and experienced staff at East West, my family would be on Centrelink payments in order to get by. Initially we thought we would not utilise long day care for our children, however my wife became ill in the second half of 2011 and it became impossible for her to work. This meant it also became very difficult for her to look after our children. I was considering leaving my full time job as a teacher to look after the family, and the only option would have been to rely upon Centrelink payments until my wife's illness was under control.

Thankfully, the incredible staff at East West recognised the impact my wife's illness was having on the family, and were able to fit in and provide additional care for our children into their program. Having our children at East West didn't only mean that my wife could take the time to concentrate on regaining her health, but our children were immersed in rich, purposeful learning that enhanced not only their confidence as learners, but nurtured their wellbeing and social/emotional growth as well. On the work front, I was able to retain my full time job and by early 2012 my wife was able to work casually.

In order for families to balance their children thriving educationally and for parents to be able to pursue their careers in the workforce, the NQF must be implemented wholeheartedly and without compromise and for quality learning environments to continue and grow. This means retaining staff-to-children ratios and ensuring the high qualifications of staff is maintained.

Michael Stephens

## S McHenry Statement – Childcare:

### My story

I am a single mother to my 20 month old son Oliver. He began attending East West childcare in January of this year 3 days/week, allowing me to return to work as a lawyer on a part-time basis. We do not have any family in Melbourne able to help provide care for Oliver, and we are fully supported by Centrelink, now supplemented by my income.

When I visited East West prior to Oliver's acceptance, I felt positive he would thrive under their care – the high ratio of staff to children, the thoughtful learning activities taking place, the happiness of the children, and dedication and high education of the staff were all immediately obvious to me. I felt a sense of family within the childcare centre, which is what I hoped for Oliver, being from such a small family of mostly two.

Since Oliver began attending East West he has benefitted in many ways, becoming a social, exuberant and happy little boy. He is always doing something different when I pick him up, under supervision, and he comes home sometimes saying a new word relating to a special activity done that day.

If I had not found childcare of such high quality I would not have chosen to put Oliver into childcare at all, despite acceptance. I would not have felt comfortable leaving him under sub-standard care or conditions. As I only began working in the legal profession 2012, to take such a long break from the workforce would have been very detrimental/possibly fatal to my career. This would have caused us to be dependent on Centrelink for much longer. I am so grateful to East West for the invaluable care they provide, giving Oliver and myself the opportunity for a bright and happy future.

To whom it may concern

Our family has a child in a community managed not for profit service. I highly value the education and care my child receives. Knowing that my child is in a high quality environment supports myself and my wife to participate in the workforce, the benefit of which to the community is substantial by way of taxation and the employment of others. I am in small business and my wife works for a large government owned corporation. Without this care, I would be unable to support the livelihoods of up to 50 employees.

It would be short sighted to take steps to minimise staffing/education levels in the sector. Too often in this society when considering the care and education of children, we fail to consider that they are the next generation of taxpayers, entrepreneurs and employers. They are the backbone of the next generation of affluence in this country, so people such as our lawmakers can enjoy a comfortable retirement.

It is their education and care now which is of vital importance to the quality of life or our community 20 or 30 years in the future.

I suggest wholeheartedly to the commission:

- Do not water down the standards of education and care for children under 3 years. Keep the current requirements for 50% of educators working with children under 3 to hold a Diploma level or higher qualification. Qualifications of educators are a vital element of high quality education and care.
- Do not remove eligibility of not for profit providers to payroll tax - this will lead to significant fee increases and may affect the viability of our service
- Do not allow services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios (by averaging over a day or a week)
- Do not simplify the National Quality Standards – quality matters for our child
- Do not introduce funding arrangements that result in reduced access and financial support for vulnerable families and children and for families in crisis.

David Haratsis