



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE INQUIRY

MS LISA GROPP, Commissioner
MR MARTIN STOKIE, Commissioner
MS DEBORAH BRENNAN, Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

TUESDAY 5 MARCH 2024

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Good morning, everybody. I'd like to reconvene our public hearings. There's a full list of people who are coming in to engage with us today. So very shortly I welcome Jane and Martel from The Front Project. There are a few preliminaries and introductory points but I just need to run through for the benefit of everybody, and we'll repeat some of these things as the day goes on. But first of all, welcome to the Productivity Commission's public hearings for our reviewing Early Childhood, Education and Care. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians - - -

10 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I was going to say you'd started really well.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So shall I pause again?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: We'll know.

20 **SHORT ADJOURNMENT** **[9.03 AM]**

RESUMED **[9.06 AM]**

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you, Lou. And apologies there for the slight technical glitch. I think you can see us and I think you can hear us. So I was just doing some preliminary introduction words, and if everybody's comfortable, I might just repeat some of those which is we're reconvening our public hearings for our Productivity Commission – into early childhood education and care. Just before I proceed, could I just ask everybody who is online to just mute yourself? Sometimes people join and then the sound carries through. I'd like to welcome everybody, and shortly I will call on Jane and Martel from The Front Project to provide their thoughts and

30 comments and

35 questions. Before we do so I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians on the lands which we're meeting, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, pay respects to elders past present and emerging and extend that acknowledgement to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are joining us today.

40 My name is Martin Stokie. I am one of the Commissioners responsible for our inquiry. I am joined on my right by Professor Deb Brennan, and on my left by Lisa Gropp. We're the three commissioners responsible for the inquiry.

45 We have a number of our team also joining either online or in the room which you may not be able to see but they're all here and very keen to hear

feedback from everyone. The purpose of today is to receive comments and questions and views around our draft report. We will publish our final report in mid-June. The transcript of today's discussions will be made available on our website relatively shortly. And our final report once provided to the
5 Federal Government in late June will ultimately then be made public. But there's a little bit of leeway for the government to choose when they do so and they have up to 25 Parliamentary sitting days to publicly release our report.

10 We're very grateful for the time and effort that people have taken to respond. We've had a number of submissions. Most of those submissions are in the process or are already on our website, I'd encourage everybody to look at everybody else's submission. There's a lot of commonality and some deep
15 thought has gone in and our work wouldn't be as progressed as it is without those thoughts and we're very welcoming for the feedback on where we've got to today. These are relatively informal despite the setting – the discussion – and we like to keep it informal and make it as easy as possible but we are – there is a transcript and that's helpful for everybody.

20 There's no oath to be taken. There is an obligation under our Parliamentary Act for the people to respond and act truthfully and we would expect nothing less and I'm sure everybody will do so. There may well be media involved or at least online. And it's not acceptable to stream the conversations that we
25 have but it's just letting everybody know that they may be here, it's a public hearing and they may be using social media to real-time engage and send out their views on how we're proceeding. And that said there may well be observers online as well.

30 There are toilets and facilities out the room. There's also standard emergency procedures. If the alarms go off we will follow the instructions and we will head out orderly in due course. And that pretty much completes all of our formal acknowledgements and administrative elements.

35 I'm going to call on Jane and Martel. What we have is approximately 45 minutes to talk about any of the feedback that you have. You may make a statement or read the perspective or we'll happily go into a discussion on the key points that you see or the questions that we have asked.

40 For the record can you just state your name and the organisation and then we'll hand over to you and we're very much here to listen.

MS HUNT: Thank you. So Jane Hunt from The Front Project.

45 MS MENZ: And Martel Menz from The Front Project.

MS HUNT: And we wanted to start with an opening statement.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Please.

MS HUNT: And then proceed to discussion. So I'd like to begin by
acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today,
5 the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and pay my respects to elders past
and present. And we wanted to thank the Productivity Commission for the
opportunity to proceed to today's hearing and for your considered and really
detailed work that you've done as part of the inquiry. And government is to
10 be commended for its commitment to charting the course for a universal,
affordable, high-quality, early childhood education and care system. And we
know that high-quality early learning and care is the key to unlocking
children's potential and supporting parents – and, especially, women to
participate in the workforce and contribute to Australia's economic
15 prosperity. The Front Project shares this commitment to every child and
family having access to quality, early learning and care, and equity should be
an underpinning principle that drives system reform.

We need a system that guarantees equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all.
20 The Productivity Commission is clear in its findings today. We currently
don't have a system that is delivering for all children and families. Access,
affordability and equality is inconsistent across the system.

Whilst we recognise the efforts of many providers, leaders and educators to
provide high-quality programs and services there are systemic issues that
25 need to be addressed. The commission has found that many children are
missing out on early learning and care, especially children experiencing
disadvantage who could stand to gain the most from ECEC. This is
consistent with our research, with First Nation's children, rural and remote
families and children from lower-income households who are impacted the
30 most.

They can struggle to find or afford a place and they are having to make
difficult decisions about work, and it's a juggling act. We strongly support a
35 universal but not uniform system. Policies, programs and interventions,
including the funding model, should be targeted for maximum impact and we
welcome the centring of children in this work, acknowledging that
participation in quality programs holds the promise of enhancing a child's
development and future life outcomes.

40 In our research with children and families, their insights and responses were
very clear. Parents and caregivers want the guarantee of an affordable place
in a centre that meets their needs. They want to know their children are safe
and well cared for and receiving the benefits of a quality program. And
children want the opportunities to play, create and learn. They want close
45 relationships with family, friends and caregivers. They want happy, healthy
childhoods. This is a promise we should be able to deliver to every child and
family who engages with the early childhood education and care system.

5 We now have an important opportunity to address these gaps in the system, to listen to children, families, providers and the workforce. And generate the ideas and policies and settings together with a stronger investment in Australia's children.

10 In reforming the early childhood education system we have a number of recommendations for early steps government could take. As a priority for government, the activity test should be removed. This test is inconsistent with the principle of equity and it's a barrier to universal access. 126,000 children would stand to benefit from such a change.

15 Another early step in the reform process should be the lifting of the childcare subsidy to a hundred per cent for the lowest income earners. We welcome the recommendation to provide three days or 30 hours per week for all children and recommend this is extended to up to five days per week for low-income or families experiencing – and/or families experiencing disadvantage.

20 We appreciate this expansion of eligibility would take some time as the sector fills capacity but we must improve the outcomes for these children. Data from the AEDC shows that children experiencing disadvantage remain the most developmentally vulnerable and outcomes for those cohorts are not consistently improving.

25 Each year more than 60,000 Australian children – so 22 per cent of all children in 2021 are assessed as developmentally vulnerable when they start school. And research shows that around half of those children never catch up. There is also a layering effect of risk factors. Children from non-English speaking backgrounds, First Nation's children and children living outside the city centres facing greater developmental vulnerability.

30 But the good news is, equality, early learning and care system is a protective mechanism. It's been shown to reduce vulnerability. So we welcome the Commission's findings and recommendations to not only approve access but to do this in a way that is conclusive of all children's needs, including greater focus on cultural competency. We welcome the recommendations to improve the intensive support program. And emphasise the importance of the system and individual services understanding their requirements and obligations to meet the needs of all children and families.

40 Part of this is supporting the sector and building their capacity to support children with varying needs. But it must be matched by appropriate resourcing and funding as identified by the Commission.

45 Another early step in reform could be or should be measures to recognise and support the early childhood workforce. A strong, sustainable workforce will be the key factor to reform success. Improving access and lifting quality

simply can't be achieved without stronger measures to attract and retain the early childhood workforce. And investing in the workforce means investing in better outcomes for children.

5 The ACCC in their childcare inquiry found that services achieving a higher quality rating under the National Quality Standard are paying staff higher rates of pay compared to those rated at a lower quality standard. When teachers and educators are supported and valued they are in the best position to plan and deliver high-quality programs for children.

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In the Commission's final report, we would like to see a stronger recommendation for government to address the paying conditions of the workforce noting that correlation between investing in staff and outcomes for children.

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Another early step we would like to see government take is a strong system stewardship and we welcome the Productivity Commissioner's position that stewardship is a critical piece of the puzzle and it will be essential in charting the course for a longer-term reform.

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In The Front Project's work, consistent stewardship we emphasise the importance of strong partnerships between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and departments and the sector and families. Government will need to – will need an early set of clearly defined and agreed priorities and objectives and work plans to deliver on the various components of the reform. We agree that an ECEC Commission would be well-positioned to drive this reform and we recommend an early version of such a body established to begin this important work.

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30 So to conclude we are heartened to see this commitment to delivering a better system for Australia's young children and their families and we look forward to working with the commission and government to deliver on its promise. Thank you.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thanks very much, Jane. And thank you very much for your quite detailed response to our draft report as well, there's quite a lot in there.

40 MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And most of it's in agreement with what we've put so it might be the margin or the nuance for yourselves. I made a note of a couple of points in there and that's – also with the microphone – I might go through there and in no particular order.

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MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But this is from the last thing you said, I took note on it, there's two others. Strong system steward.

MS HUNT: M'mm.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I was going to ask what does that mean to you? And we have heard different views of, 'Well, don't repeat the existing systems of ACECQA or AERO from a research point of view. And we've got most of these things at the State level. So what is this thing you're going to do? And then we hear from others that, you know, there's all these gaps and things slip through and nobody is taking a whole of a system view. A whole of early-years perspective and how does the ECEC sector fit together so I'm interested in your view around that.

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15 And then you also just said at the very end there's early work that could be done. And I just wondered if you want to expand a little bit more on what is that early work in your mind ahead of actually establishing potentially some form of commission or steward.

20 MS MENZ: You go.

MS HUNT: So I think some of it comes down to what people understand to be the definition of system stewardship.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS HUNT: So we define system stewardship and that was based on a review of literature and the way that it's been used in different contexts. So we define system stewardship as an overarching coordination and cohesive response to help steer the system towards its policy objectives and stated vision. And that is distinct from market stewardship which is more about the role of governments in shaping the markets in the provision of public services.

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35 The functions we would see of system stewardship include the policy development and advice for governments and the sector. The oversight and coordination of a national ECEC research agenda. The collection of data where appropriate and that could be with other organisations. It doesn't have to be instead of.

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But also including all of the nuances amongst all the jurisdictions because they're all different. And, you know, government should be able to have access to data around that. The oversight of the National workforce strategy, monitoring the system performance and measurement against objectives. So that includes feedback loops and a review of the regulatory sort of arrangements.

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We would see that ACECQA would almost sit within or underneath the ECEC Commission in that way. For us system stewardship involves all the actors in the system.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS HUNT: Not just government. So that means you've got participation of providers, families as well in the system stewardship function. The reason for that is each one of those actors in the system holds a piece of the puzzle.
10 They're able to see what's happening around the performance in the system, and otherwise, you only get one perspective and you don't understand the performance or the impact of the system. Did you want to add to that?

MS MENZ: I think, you know, if I reflect on one example which could be used, not as a template per se, but as a useful example. If we think about preschool, universal access to preschool, and how that, you know, States, Territories, Commonwealth – did come together with an overarching objective a number of years ago back in 2007, 2008 to deliver on a promise of 15 hours given towards, which we did, 15 hours universal access for all
15 four-year-old children. And that required really strong stewardship and coordination across all levels of government with that, you know, focus and commitment to deliver on that promise for children.
20

Now, it wasn't without its challenges but I think we saw once the
25 commitment and the objective was set by all levels of government there was that really concerted effort and enduring coordinated effort between all players. And as Jane mentioned it was critical as that reform was unfolding and you have built up the hours to 15. The sector was, you know, a critical part of that reform. They were involved the whole way through, you know,
30 all the various stakeholders and peak bodies came together and were on this path to achieve such an important goal for preschool children.

So I guess if there's one example of where we have done it before. As I said it was, you know, it was never perfect. It's always challenging work but I
35 think it, you know, it can definitely be done. And if this, you know, the example of moving towards universal access of all children across the early childhood years path that sort of approach would be, you know, incredibly important.

40 COMMISSIONER GROPP: We've had some feedback including yesterday from Sharon Goldfeld that perhaps, the focus should be – I think she renamed it – the ECD

MS MENZ: Social Ventures Australia did that, yes.

45 COMMISSIONER GROPP: ECD - - -

MS MENZ: And early childhood.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Early childhood and development.

5 COMMISSIONER GROPP: So broader than just ECEC.

MS MENZ: M'mm.

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Only I guess you've got to have some boundaries around things - - -

MS HUNT: M'mm.

15 COMMISSIONER GROPP: But I guess those various important connections around various supports, et cetera. So what's your score on that?

MS HUNT: Yes. I agree on the important connections in and around ECD. ECD involves multiple systems. They talk about any system that affects a child's development, so housing - - -

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

25 MS HUNT: - - - the whole family support.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Health.

30 MS HUNT: Health. That's right.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

35 MS HUNT: And the way those systems support children through their development and their life stages are incredibly important. I think what we're talking about here is a commission that is focused on the early childhood education and care system. It could take into account the interaction and the intersections with other systems. But I would say if you focused it to ECD which at the moment would sit under the early years strategy, you could diffuse impact on the system that we really need to focus on. So I think
40 there's a tension there. Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: There is. Did you want to follow that up, Lisa?

45 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Well, you can follow it up – if I may ask that was an interesting point because - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Because it sort of have to. I guess it's making sure that you have – you're not blind to those connections - - -

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MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: - - - and interfaces and you highlight where there's some pinch point or something.

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MS HUNT: Yes. And that would be picked up wouldn't it? Because things like the intensive support program that's all about intersecting with other systems - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: And changes coming from the NDIS.

MS HUNT: That's right. NDIS so once – you're absolutely right. It needs to be a part of the scope but I think it needs to be focused clearly on the system.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's really helpful, thanks Jane. And we really, as you can see we are genuinely grappling with this question.

MS HUNT: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And I think – actually first of all I just wanted to acknowledge the role of The Front Project in bringing thinking about system stewardship to this sector.

MS HUNT: M'mm.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It is undoubtedly your work that got many of us thinking in new ways about the enshrining the system stewardship which has not been a part of it. I think I was very – I've been drawn to the idea of a broader early childhood commission so I'm listening hard to your response.

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MS HUNT: M'mm.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Partly because I'm very anxious about us sort of setting up a new – like a mega silo of ECEC.

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MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Just at the moment when we are learning so much about the critical importance of connections with services outside what's defined as ECEC.

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MS HUNT: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So that – I think that's the struggle and the challenge that we'll have to deal with here. Because a bit like Julia Gillard in the Royal Commission redefined preschool I think there's a challenge to us about what ECEC actually is. And I know there's one sort of relatively easy answer - - -

10 MS HUNT: M'mm.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - around funding and service types and so on.

15 MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But the more we hear, particularly from the most disadvantaged.

20 MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: The more my conception about what ECEC actually is - - -

25 MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - is challenged.

30 MS HUNT: Yes. I agree with that Deb and if we think about the feedback from children – you're not thinking in this - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No, darn.

35 MS HUNT: They're thinking more broadly aren't they, about their relationships to their communities and to their teacher - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: They are. Yes.

40 MS HUNT: - - - and their families. They're thinking about their access to outdoor play areas, to nature, the importance of culture and community in their lives and so on. So they are thinking holistically about their experiences. So I completely understand. How do we have a system that does that as well? Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So what we've got to find is that sweet spot - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - between diluting the focus of the commission – like of everything - - -

5 MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - versus another big silo - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - on top of the bits that we have got.

MS HUNT: Yes. That's right.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: I'd just leave – just leave that with us.

MS HUNT: Yes. Okay.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Can I maybe delve a little bit further on this as well? It sounded to me, and I'm just playing back what I heard, that you're seeing the role that steward or the Commission, whatever you want to call it, is very much a coordination role and bringing together the information, the ideas, the parties to move together forward. Do you see it having real teeth on anything other than it's identified an issue, it's going to reassert that issue,
25 it's going to ventilate that issue? It's going to – hopefully develop and support. But the other parties have to all come to that party, or will it have some controlling capacity? And you also mentioned – and because that's what I heard. I heard it was more of a coordinating - - -

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MS HUNT: Right. Okay.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - rather than – that's why I'm sort of trying to just delve a bit further from your perspective of what you mean. And then I also heard that you said explicitly it wasn't going to be a market steward and I
35 think we've put into our draft report. And at least we have heard the various discussions around – well, maybe a steward could help involving deciding for instance where investment should be going into under-served or unserved markets.

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MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And/or what's the relationship between a provider whose rating is perennially underperforming?

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MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And their access – continued access to the government support funding or - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - the whole range of, you know, very specific, you know, setting the rate cap. You know? There's some very market-orientated roles that are being done now to an extent by different parties but not in necessarily a coordinated whole-of-system view. But I heard you say, 'No we don't think that would be a role for this party.'

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MS HUNT: Okay - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: At least that's what I was hearing. So I'm just playing back what I've heard to really test - - -

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MS HUNT: Yes. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - have I heard correctly?

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MS HUNT: Yes. Thank you. Do you want me to go first?

MS MENZ: Yes.

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MS HUNT: Yes. We see market stewardship will be in the system stewardship. So we would see it as an 'and' rather than an 'either/or'.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

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MS HUNT: And in that way, it would sit right.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS HUNT: It does. Because we absolutely agree with you there are things that we would encourage thinking about in the system such as entry points for providers if they don't consistently meet it, you know, to establish a new service. They should be consistently meeting the quality standard before establishing the new services. Those kinds of things we would see in the market stewardship underneath the system stewardship approach. So we would see it that way. Do you want to come in?

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MS MENZ: Yes. I think – yes, just to emphasise what Jane is saying is we do need to see a greater emergence of accountability because the market as it stands at the moment is not delivering for all children. So, you know, the Productivity Commission's inquiry has found that and the ACCC's inquiry has found that. We can't just, you know, continue the status quo. There does need to be whether it's, you know, future Early Childhood Education and

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Care Commission or some body, some authority, that does have the ability to play a far greater role in holding service providers and the sector to that level of account so that we can be as sure as possible that every child is given the greatest benefit from being in the service. So and I think, you know, it will be really important that the commission or whatever shape the authority takes does have access to the sort of information and data and that that information is shared so they can, as you say, identify where these under-served and unserved communities are right down to the real local level so that, again, children who do need access to care aren't missing out as they currently are. So, again, it is that coordination and, you know, access to the information that the sector needs for that sort of position - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sure.

MS HUNT: It's also the government's function isn't it?

MS MENZ: It is.

MS HUNT: Yes. Which is slightly more than coordination. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Well, those functions are undertaken, but they're undertaken in different parts

MS HUNT: Yes. That's right

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And not necessarily as a part of a collective whole looking at the – they've just doing their component.

MS HUNT: That's right.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I was going to move onto a different topic unless there was something (indistinct).

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No. I think - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Why don't you lead with yours and I'll come back to mine.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thanks, Martin. All right. Well, I wanted to shift to the question about broader funding reform. So we've – as you know – we've set out a range of possible options.

MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Several of which go further than the one that comes with our preferred recommendation in the draft and we've made a finding which you've noted that broader funding would make ECEC more

affordable for more families but that it would come at a substantial cost to the taxpayer. And you've made some observations about that and the way you think we should think about that cost. So I invite you to expand on that.

5 MS MENZ: Yes. Deb. Thank you. So first of all I think, yes, the work that the commission had done in the deep analysis and the, you know, putting really clear options on the table for us to consider in this inquiry is to be commended. Because it's very difficult work to even conceptualise the, you know, the very complex funding system we have in this sector.

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As we see it there does need to be, we think, to deliver on the objectives of universal access and addressing disadvantage, we do think there needs to be pretty bold ambitious reform of the funding model balanced against a pragmatic approach. So we would see this as by necessity being long-term reform of the funding system. You know, there are, you know, the child care subsidy as it stands has some features that work and has some that are failing. And both your inquiry and the ACCC have found that to be the case.

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20 So we can see that in the, sort of, immediate to short term, there could be some steps that could be taken to enhance the current funding model. For example, as we have submitted, the removal of the activity test would be one measure we'd like to see taken pretty early in the piece.

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25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Is that the 30 hours Martel, you're speaking about - - -

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MS MENZ: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - the removal of 30 hours?

MS MENZ: Well, we would say remove the activity test entirely.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But 30 hours as an early step.

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MS MENZ: That's right. It's the early step for 30 hours would be very welcome. And then progressively move that to the up to five days of access for low-income families as the next early step.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: You would - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Sorry, go on.

MS MENZ: No – sorry.

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: So it's the next early steps so far - - -

MS MENZ: Yes. And over time gradually enhancing the system so that we do move towards that, you know, more hours, more access. And I think what's important to emphasise here is that we can never lose sight of quality because as we have, you know, said in our submission it's so critically
5 important that we can't just increase days and hours and dosage. That's not what children and families deserve. So it's got to be balanced against, how can we continue to build the capacity of the sector, you know, workforce is obviously a key part of that.

10 So that the programs that are being delivered to children in whatever early childhood setting are of the highest quality possible. So it's a balance.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So thank you, Martel. So just relating to the funding reform question. You bring to our attention issues around
15 affordability and remind us of the dual focus of the ECEC system is what the children's development – also – pardon me – parents' workforce participation. I wanted to ask you when in 2023, I should know, but when in 2023 your survey was conducted?

20 MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Was it after – before – was it before the - - -

MS MENZ: No. It was after.
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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It was after.

MS MENZ: And so we actually conducted two – the initial research was conducted in July and then October we undertook a further pulse check, just
30 to really test and measure, Deb, the impact of those sort of changes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So when you found the higher proportion of families' financially stressed, that was after the cheaper childcare report, was it?
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MS MENZ: That's correct.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay. Right.

40 MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Well, that was – okay - - -

MS MENZ: I think perhaps, interesting to note there too is that we know that
45 new financial year is often – sort of a usual trigger point for services to increase their fees. So, you know, the two things happen concurrently. But,

yes, we did find a sizeable number of families still really finding the fees, you know, to be unaffordable.

5 MS HUNT: Yes. And we should clarify that's the family's perception.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Sure.

10 MS HUNT: So as Martel said there's a number of factors that could be at play about the timing in here.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

15 MS HUNT: The follow-up pulse survey in October because we too – we're thinking – it's just a timing issue.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS HUNT: It was still prevalent for the families - - -

20 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

MS HUNT: - - - at that was the - - -

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And all (indistinct), you're right to point out perception.

MS HUNT: Yes.

30 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But perception had increased between the first survey and the July survey and then again for October? Is that right?

MS HUNT: No. It was pretty steady in that - - -

35 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It was steady. Yes. But it didn't go down - - -

MS HUNT: No.

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: After the initial kind of shock.

MS HUNT: No. But what we did have was a group of families who increased number of hours.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right. Okay.

MS HUNT: So that showed, and again that's only July to October also that - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

5 MS HUNT: So it did see a slight shift in engagement.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

MS HUNT: And obviously that's an early sign that it may have that impact.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS HUNT: I think the other interesting thing about that survey was how many families in regional and remote areas felt they weren't able to participate in early childhood education and care. I think it's 30 - - -

15 MS MENZ: Thirty-nine percent.

MS HUNT: - - -39 per cent - - -

20 MS MENZ: A sizeable number.

MS HUNT: Yes. So that you're starting to see those disparities by geography. Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: We've had some great engagement around - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

30 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Around that issue.

MS HUNT: Yes.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I quite like the notion around almost a staged progression. There's a pragmatism to that and it's acknowledging we can't do everything tomorrow or yesterday. I'm interested in your view of what does short and medium-term actually look like. I mean are we talking about, is it three months or is it three years or it's whatever?

40 MS MENZ: Sure. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: More broadly we've given you a range of options around the funding model, so on Deb's point and we have put our line in the sand so to speak, but it's a draft so we're seeking feedback.

45 MS MENZ: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: What I am hearing is that it's the augmentation, within reason, of some very focused areas in under-served and unserved but also into vulnerable or low-income families. But it's within – it's expanding the existing system. We have other options there. I am just interested in what your thoughts are around we have given a whole suite of options.

MS MENZ: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: In the draft - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes, regarding cut-off for example.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

15 MS MENZ: Yes. Yes. Well, I think in terms of the options that the Commission has laid out option two is the option that we see as having the greatest impact and I think that's exactly why, Martin, having early opportunities for targeted investment and interventions is where we have the deepest impact for the children who do need it the most.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS MENZ: So, you know, if we're looking at, for example, a 10-year reform you could break it up into, you know, sort of – lots of three years, roughly.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS MENZ: And target your policy settings accordingly, depending on what – yes, what those outcomes are that you're endeavouring to - - -

30 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So with the 10-year reform will you stick with option two and just roll that out over 10 years? Or would you consider other kinds of reform?

35 MS MENZ: Yes. Yes - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's all right.

40 MS MENZ: - - - I'd – No. I need to – No. I need to think about that further.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's fine. No worries.

MS MENZ: We'll give you a proper response. Sorry.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. That's fine.

MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I think I saw it in yours. It might have been someone else – so apologies but - - -

5 MS MENZ: M'mm.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and nobody has actually raised it but I think you have which is at least around the current sort of supports for families for children. But for families with multiple children at early
10 childhood education and care.

MS MENZ: M'mm.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And as you're probably aware at least the
15 subsidy rates that there are quite a – well there's the taper rate for those – all over the place - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - that it doesn't have a sense of consistency or smoothness and it probably reflects some decisions at a point in time – of jagged edges and - - -

MS HUNT: Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - cliffs don't work well in terms of reducing the subsidy rates. They create significant challenges at the margin.

MS HUNT: M'mm.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I'm just wondering do you have a perspective around multiple children, and I am asking because nobody else has really raised this issue yet.

35 MS HUNT: Yes. So our perspective would go back to those core principles around access and what enables access and participation for children and families. And I don't think we have a definite finding around multiple children, do we?

40 MS MENZ: Not in terms of our own research.

MS HUNT: No. And, in fact, it wasn't something we asked families about, to be honest.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: That's fine.

5 MS HUNT: We have, in the past, worked with previous governments around enabling families with multiple children to ensure all children have access. So in that way, in the past, we have made recommendations for some smoothing taper rates and ensuring access. But, particularly, for low-income families.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

10 MS HUNT: Yes. We've put our lens on that. Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Jane, can I take you to including support and you've mentioned layering of the risk factors, et cetera, and we've made a number of recommendations around that which you've supported. But have we gone far enough? I mean and particularly we're really grappling with – we were pretty light touch in our draft report at the time and the issues around the NDIS review and now that that's subsequently come out. But it's fairly – it's not definitive about what should happen – but just getting your views around that. I mean because it's something that's going to become – and also you've raised the issue of cultural safety, et cetera, and cultural supports.

20 MS HUNT: Yes. Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Not just disability support.

MS HUNT: Yes.

30 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Though acute disability will certainly get focus in the coming years I suspect.

MS HUNT: Yes. Okay. So a number of thoughts on ISP and Martel chip in here.

35 MS MENZ: Yes

40 MS HUNT: So what we were finding when we were talking with services is that the current program is slow to respond. So there's a gap. So a family present with a child and the services node takes a while to get the appropriate support and the appropriate funding. And that's a lengthy administrative process. So that becomes prohibitive for services because they're making decisions about where they put their effort and energy and how many children they can have who may be engaged in an ISP program.

45 So our recommendations with streamlining those processes, there are some aspects that you can – teachers and educators can be equipped to deal with and make judgment calls on and can allocate resources. And so that would

smooth out some of that process. There is also a huge desire in the workforce to be upskilled.

5 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

MS HUNT: To be able to support children more effectively and we find that every time we talk to educators and teachers. And some of that is about children who may have moderate needs – not necessarily very complex needs that educators and teachers can, in their practice, be able to support children and families better. So there's a workforce upskilled piece in there.

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Is that an upskill in the just general training?

MS HUNT: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER GROPP: As well as one's professional development.

MS HUNT: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Or a mix of both.

MS HUNT: That mix of both. So you know we've talked to educators and teachers about working with children who have diabetes or particular conditions. Those are things about upskilling and training. They're not – so that would smooth that out and take up a role and you might want to talk about that from your background.

25 MS MENZ: Yes.

30 MS HUNT: And I'll pick up another point afterwards.

MS MENZ: Sure. No worries.

MS HUNT: Yes.

35 MS MENZ: You know, many, many years ago as a former early childhood teacher myself what was most important was that you come out with the skills and abilities to support those children who, you know, will fit on a spectrum of need as Jane said, from very, you know, mild to moderate needs to very complex additional needs. And I think what will be important is in looking at inclusion and support we are inclusive of all the needs, not just at the most acute end, or for children who do come with a formal diagnosis of a disability or a special needs. So we need to be quite, you know, broaden our scope when we think about those children.

45 And then it's absolutely about the sort of access to high-quality professional development that is, you know, based in contemporary pedagogy and

practice. It's, you know, evidence-based research based because of course we're learning all the time about the sort of interventions and supports that can best support these children and the family as well, because that's, you know, that's such an important role with early childhood teachers and educators. It's the wrap-around support of often the whole family where whether it's, you know, long daycare, preschool family daycare. You might be the first experience of a formal education setting.

So the trust that families put in you, as an educator or a teacher, is very high. And so you want to know that you can provide the very best to that child. And as Jane said have, you know, smooth access, ready access to whatever sort of intervention or support you need beyond your own training and professional development. So if that's allied health support, preschool field officers, inclusion support package funding, all those extra things that enhance your work for those – given for those children.

MS HUNT: And just on ISP I feel suddenly, you know, very – I have opinions on it – Deb, we're talking about that intersection around ECD, isn't it?

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: M'mm.

MS HUNT: Because it's about the child's development. Just on that, you asked about cultural competency or cultural harm and safety, there are a group of sector people in the A3 Fellowship who were focused on this issue around cultural safety and cultural harm. And the First Nation's fellows who were part of that group are very articulate about the ways in which services often don't appreciate and serve children's cultural needs. And we often talk about and frame it as 'cultural safety'. The flip of that is 'harm'. And I think what those groups of A3 Fellows and what we would like to underscore is there is a great deal of awareness and development that needs to happen in that space. So that Aboriginal children, Torres Strait Islander children who are in any service feel that their culture is recognised, celebrated, acknowledged and understood. That has a profound effect on the child's identity and development. And so that's why we often talk about the importance of cultural safety and minimising cultural harm in all services across Australia. Do you want to add anything around those things?

MS MENZ: No. I think the final thing I'd say is that and we reflect this in our submission. You know, it's a whole area that needs greater attention, greater investment and capacity building, because I think one suggestion was that well could we, you know, use allied health support workers, intervention, aids, et cetera? And I think to an extent you can and I think they're an incredibly useful resource and support. But we have cautioned in our submission that we wouldn't want to see allied health workers of any kind replace the expertise of early childhood educators or teachers.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

5 MS MENZ: And you know that obviously the allied health sector is under its own workforce pressures as well. So it's sort of – it's getting the balance right.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I just want to take that a little bit further, not so much on allied health - - -

10 MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - but more so around the early childhood and education care workforce – it's one of the things that you raised at the very beginning - - -

15 MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - it's a critical challenge at the moment , and we too acknowledge that.

20 MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: In fact, we think it's the primary immediate - - -

25 MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - challenge that if we can't get that, then we can't do anything else.

30 MS HUNT: Agreed.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And I'm just wondering if you wanted to talk a little bit further about what you see as the solutions in that respect, both in a sort of an immediate but also – like, to Deb's point, if you had 10 years, not just what would you do today. What is that sort of – what is the end goal that you see and what does that look and feel like and, please, feel free to comment on what needs to be done tomorrow.

40 MS HUNT: Yes.

MS MENZ: Yes. Okay. Do you want to?

45 MS HUNT: Go.

MS MENZ: Yes. Sure. So we couldn't agree more. Workforce is the critical issue that needs to be resolved and we would say it is the most urgent

issue that requires attention. Acknowledging what you say though, Martin, is that we can then build out a, you know, short, mid to long-term workforce strategy.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS MENZ: Obviously we have ACECQA's workforce strategy that's been in place for a number of years. We do welcome the recommendation of this inquiry to review, refresh that, reinvigorate it, because there are some areas
10 that need very urgent attention.

For us, within the umbrella of workforce, it is pay and conditions. It is about attraction and retention of teachers and educators.

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And the strategy is pretty weak on that. It's, 'Well let's look at them.' I mean - - -

MS MENZ: Let's address it. Well, yes. I mean this sector has been crying out for this sort of attention for decades – let's be honest. So we would like to see the government take a much stronger intervention on this. In the inquiry,
20 we acknowledge that you have referenced the existing processes at the Fair Work Commission - - -

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. indeed.

MS MENZ: - - - supported bargaining and, you know, the potential running of work value cases, et cetera, strengthened provisions within the Fair Work Commission. We would say that is part of it but it doesn't go far enough. And it won't deliver the outcomes we need in a timely enough manner. One
30 of the challenges with the supported bargaining, and whilst we very much welcome – and the sector is delighted to now have this industrial option to pursue – it's simply not going to scope in enough providers, and therefore employees in a quick enough time to do the sort of reforms that we all hope to achieve.

35 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's interesting, Martel. I mean we've had some discussions and briefings about the Fair Work Commission process and where then informed about the 'rope in' provisions that could follow - - -

40 MS MENZ: Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - from a decision. But we haven't got any clarity probably because none could be given to us about what sort of timing and what portion of the sector might that be and would that even be done by
45 within the life of that - - -

MS MENZ: That's right.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That enterprise bargaining.

MS MENZ: Yes.

5

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Who knows?

MS MENZ: So if I think about when I have undertaken enterprise bargaining before, here in Victoria, and that's been through both multi-employer bargaining, under the provisions of the Fair Work Act, as well as single-interest bargaining which is how we, here in Victoria, we deliver things like the benchmark enterprise bargain agreements that span virtually all kindergarten or preschool - - -

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS MENZ: Preschools here in Victoria. And so there is a little bit of a precedent set with those sorts of agreements if we think about now how supported bargaining can and will work. Those agreements and I have negotiated a number of them in my time in the sector, they generally take two and a half to three years from start to finish. They're incredibly, you know, complicated because even once you do get the main funding body, and in this case government to come to the table, to then talk about what funding would facilitate the outcomes of any EBA, that takes some time.

25

So, yes, we have got these, you know, rope-in provisions. And this is unprecedented. We all know that and it is very exciting so I don't want to be dismissing or diminishing such an important process that's available to the sector. But I am very concerned about the length of time it will take to scope in enough providers and enough employees to have that impact.

30

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Well, I think that's really important particularly because we're talking about upskilling educators and teachers - - -

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MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: They're talking about the impact of NDIS reform, and broader conceptions of inclusivity and so on, all of which place additional pressure on the workforce. Yes. And the challenge is going to be not to lose the momentum of what's built up in the sector I think - - -

40

MS MENZ: That's right.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - over the last couple of years.

MS MENZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: By stalling on the wages issue.

5

MS HUNT: Yes. Yes. That's right. So it is wages and conditions and - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And conditions.

10

MS HUNT: Yes. That's right. But also reducing some of the barriers to upskilling as you know.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: M'mm.

MS HUNT: And there are good models now that have been tested.

15

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Do you think we've done okay on that in our draft report? We've got a number of recommendations there - - -

MS HUNT: Yes. Yes. Yes, we did.

20

MS MENZ: I think it's a really good, yes, package and a suite of measures.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay.

25

MS HUNT: Yes.

MS MENZ: I think it hits – sort of hits all the right - - -

30

COMMISSIONER GROPP: And getting a balance between sort of say, accelerated pathways and trying to work it out without diluting the quality, I guess.

MS HUNT: That's right.

35

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. You think we hit that enough?

40

MS HUNT: Yes. We have found in our upskilling programs that we run with different organisations that for some educators accelerated pathways don't work well. And, particularly, those who are juggling multiple priorities outside of work. So that's why you need multiple streams. And probably – well, I would say one of the things that we need is to help the workforce, understand what is the best stream for them and their circumstances.

45

Because there's very little help for people when they're thinking about skilling and thinking about, 'Okay. Where should I do that? Do I do an accelerated or not? Can I get access to scholarship? Can I get access to support?' So I think there is a little bit of work that needs to happen.

MS MENZ: And navigate a type role.

MS HUNT: Yes. Triage people in – to the right – so that they stay so that you've got better retention.

5

COMMISSIONER GROPP: It's all about the 'blue' function and because – you know - - -

MS HUNT: Yes. That's right.

10

COMMISSIONER GROPP: - - - one in person.

MS HUNT: That's right.

15

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And having them staying is the critical thing for us because we're seeing some research that says that when educators seek to upskill to teachers, it's a fast track out of early childhood. There's a supported fast-track out of the system.

20

MS HUNT: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And with some of the structural differences between – particularly between centre-based and long daycare and - - -

25

MS HUNT: That's right.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - kindy and preschool – it's pretty obvious why that happens. So - - -

30

MS HUNT: Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We have a couple more minutes. Are there other things that we haven't really had a chance to talk about that you wanted to put on the table and make clear, emphasise, prioritise?

35

COMMISSIONER GROPP: I've got one quick one – because with all of your 'agrees', there's one 'disagrees' and I thought, 'Hang on.'

MS HUNT: What are they doing?

40

COMMISSIONER GROPP: This is – well, that's interesting. We had a finding saying or a comment that families do not use to a significant amount of the ECEC that they pay for. And you disagree.

45

MS MENZ: Yes. So we – actually when we read that finding we were a little bit surprised I suppose by you finding that. We then undertook to have some conversations with various providers and their peak bodies as well.

And they reported to us that, no that's not their experience. And these are both large and, you know, small to mid-sized providers.

5 COMMISSIONER GROPP: It tends to go to people – you pay for 10 hours when the child doesn't usually – most children aren't there for 10 or 12 hours.

MS MENZ: Sure. Sure.

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: So you pay for a day, buy a day.

MS MENZ: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER GROPP: So I guess you could – okay, they're not there, are they having an option value that they could be there if they wanted to be there? That sort of - - -

MS MENZ: Yes. Sure.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: - - - burden we're observing - - -

MS MENZ: Yes. I mean, that's – yes. I understand. And I think what we were hearing was that – yes, not all families do use that the full 10-hour block or whatever the amount of time is. But, generally speaking, most children are using most of the hours.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Maybe it's a sort of – I think often what they see as a day.

30 MS MENZ: M'mm.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: The 10 or 12-hour days are trying to cater for flexibility with families. So some families need to start early.

35 COMMISSIONER GROPP: And a bit later to pick them up or you can – you've got that flexibility- - -

MS MENZ: That's right.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And the six hours, on average, that people are attending might be a different six hours over the course of a day.

MS MENZ: Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But in their mindset, I'm using my day.

MS MENZ: I'm using my day. That's right. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It's just that we're having to fund a service - - -

MS MENZ: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And this is the contrast between say preschool or at least maybe it historically was - or even schools - fixed hours, very fixed days.

MS MENZ: That's right. Yes. Yes.

10

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And so it does away with, you know, it doesn't have the package, apart from we have outside-of-school hours care.

MS MENZ: Yes.

15

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And potentially to cater for families and the children's needs beyond what that sort of very structured arrangement is. But, yes. So - - -

20

MS MENZ: Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: I know that's sort of significant.

MS MENZ: Yes.

25

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. I think it's an interesting point. Like I mean which bit – which bit did we get wrong?

COMMISSIONER GROPP: I know - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Exactly. We like gold elephant stamps on everything.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

35

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you very much for taking the time today. We're very – as to Deb's point before, which is we very much appreciate the input from yourselves – the research that you're doing – the research you're actually doing for us as part of our – part of this inquiry - - -

40

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - which is to hear the voice of the child and for those that are listening there is some work we are commissioning amongst others which we will make available and will inform our imperative it is to go out and hear the voices of the children through experts. It's not us doing that. But experts who are trained in communication and engaging with

children and that's incredibly positive at least from the draft material we've seen to date.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you.

MS HUNT: Thank you all.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thanks for joining us again. You've had the benefit of the earlier conversations, so I won't need to repeat many of the things. But, perhaps, just for the benefit of the transcript, if you could just state your name and the organisation. If you have a statement that you wanted to make – you can end with some key points initially and then some
15 questions or otherwise. But we have a little bit of time and we're as much in your hands as everybody else. So I'll hand over to you.

MS KEARY: Okay. Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to be able to present at the hearing today and thank the Productivity Commission for the
20 substantive work that you're doing in the field. So I'm Anne Keary and I'm representing the Victorian Association for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. And along with the Queensland Association for TESOL – Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages – we submitted a response to the draft report.

25 So I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past and present.

30 So today we would like to highlight three key factors which we believe could promote culturally safe early childhood education and care for children who are English language learners. So we're taking a deep dive into that space and trying to make visible English language learners.

35 This includes the group that is often known as CALD – that is children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds – and those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are English language learners.

40 So the three factors I'd like to talk about is the Inclusion Support Program, teacher education courses and professional learning and mentoring experiences for educators and teachers.

45 So the first thing, Inclusion Support Program. We would like an improved Inclusion and Support Program that caters to all children which could particularly support English language learners ensuring their full participation in ECEC.

We believe that promoting language support for English language learners, as well as support for their home languages be paramount. This involves specific provisions for English language learners' eligibility in the Inclusion Support Program as English language learners.

5

In addition, revised terminology plays a vital role in making the needs of English language learners visible in the ISP. We took up the adoption of the term English as an Additional Language or Dialect, acronym EALD, to accurately identify children who are beginning to learn English alongside their home languages. The term 'EALD' is strength-based and aligned with educational terminology used in schools, fostering consistency in reporting and understanding.

10

It's inclusive of diverse groups, including First Nations, migrants and refugee English language learners, unlike the umbrella term CALD which may exclude certain groups, particularly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are learning English as an additional language. By implementing these strategies within the ISP framework we argue we could create a more inclusive and culturally safe environment for English language learners.

15

20

The second point I'd like to talk about is the development of early childhood teacher education courses. Development of these courses could focus on building the capacity of educators to tailor programs to the needs of English language learner's families and communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities for their children.

25

We believe it is imperative that teacher education courses are tailored to enhance the capacity of educators in meeting the needs of English language learners. We propose the development of courses across various levels, from certificate to post-graduate programs that cater for English language learners and tailor the programs to language learning needs and diverse linguistic backgrounds of children and their families. I would just like to emphasise that English language learners are not an homogenous group.

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35

Importantly, we must address the challenges posed by accelerated courses, which we have had a discussion about, which often lead to high attrition rates. It's crucial to ensure that initiatives to upskill pre-service teachers, in working with multilingual learners and their families are thoughtfully designed and implemented.

40

We emphasise the significance of practicum placements in early childhood settings with early childhood educators and teachers who are experienced in supporting English language learners. These opportunities could provide pre-service teachers with invaluable insights as well as valuable practical experience with working with multilingual learners and their families.

45

We believe in language-informed-play-based approaches, which contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of effective practices in the area. So we don't want English language learners separated out for separate programs, but rather that they're included in the play-based approaches.

5

The third and last factor involves ongoing targeted coaching, mentoring and professional development for professional staff working in early childhood services. This includes professional learning in language-informed programs which hold the key to not only improving the quality of ECEC programs but also to enhancing workforce capability and retention. And we'd like to acknowledge the large immigrant working force, working in ECEC who bring a rich linguistic resource with them to the workforce.

10

Language-informed programs provide upskilling opportunities – I've said that. By investing in targeting coaching mentoring and professional development we can equip professional staff with the knowledge and the skills necessary to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for children with English as an additional language and/or dialect. So thank you.

15

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you very much. Are you happy if we dive into each of those in turn?

MS KEARY: Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Is that okay with you? We, too, have recognised and reflected on the inclusion support program and for a whole range of reasons, we don't think it's delivering on its ambition and mainly it's around the resources and that seems to be catered to the children that have the very most acute needs, and that's being disability rather than language or other sorts of issues. I was just interested in how you thought at a practical sense, yes. We have an expanded inclusion program, what does that look like for you? Does that look like another educator who has language skills or is it a person who has language skills who may be isn't an educator but can complement and supplement the team who are educators and teachers, et cetera? But what does that look like?

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MS KEARY: Well, I guess it depends on, you know, we live in such sparse geographical areas, and it depends on who is available in local communities - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS KEARY: - - - to be able to support children in an inclusion support program. So it may be a bi- or multilingual worker - - -

45

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS KEARY: - - - who has an ECEC background.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

5 MS KEARY: It may be drawing on local community human resources who help support the educator and teacher with the early childhood program and support those children.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. I suppose that's what I was trying to get. Are we looking for the 'unicorn' with the – the educator who's speaking three languages, trained in, I don't know, community services, understands the bureaucracy, is an IT savant who can work the Centrelink system, et cetera? Or are we looking for say in this individual case somebody who has – is multilingual, but they may not sort of be trained as educators and teachers but
15 can work with the educators and teachers, particularly bridging that gap around the communication capacity? Or do they need to have the minimum sort of educating capacities, so be able to (indistinct) educators in scope?

20 MS KEARY: I guess the ultimate aim would be to look for multilingual educators - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sure.

25 MS KEARY: - - - who have language-informed practices.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

30 MS KEARY: And who know about second language acquisition theory and practices. But also, to have a multilingual education, like a teacher aide, to support the educators and teachers and to become a part of that partnership and a part of that team.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

35 MS KEARY: To support the children and the families.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Can I just ask Martin?

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: I thought, Anne, also might have a little bit – but I thought you were also talking about something much in a way simpler - which is that your everyday educator and teacher have a greater awareness that English language learners and maybe some really basic skills around that, rather than specialist additional or it always being specialist additional staff?

MS KEARY: I think we're talking about both.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Both. Yes.

5 MS KEARY: So the upskilling of educators and teachers in this field. We feel that sometimes that this English-language learning – learners and approaches – for supporting English language learners isn't a priority when it comes to professional development and learning.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. Yes.

MS KEARY: Also there's not a lot of them. It's under researched and there's a lot of evidence base in the field and so we feel that that is also an area that needs - - -

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. I feel – I really, really like the term English language learners. I like its positivity and strength. But you refer to various terms, some of which I found harder to get my head around.

20 MS KEARY: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So I have got two questions. One is you asked us to consider promoting the term home language other than English – rather than non-English speaking background. There's just something there that's just not getting into my brain. So I'd like you to tell us a bit more about that.

25 And the other one again was just the limitation on my part, I'm sure. But you talk about, you know, EAL/D, English as an Additional Language or dialect. I just didn't understand the dialect component. So those are the two questions that I have for you.

30 MS KEARY: Well dialect is a very complex space, and I believe that even as, you know, a lot of government bodies are grappling with this notion. Should we include dialect or not – include dialect. So it's not an easy term to - - -

35 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Is a lot lost if you talk about English as an additional language? Is a lot lost by not having the /D?

40 MS KEARY: It depends on where you're coming from. Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: All right. Okay.

45 MS KEARY: It is a complex base that – it is a hard space to get into.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS KEARY: And sometimes it can open up a can of worms, but sometimes it's more inclusive, I guess, when we're - - -

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right. And I guess - - -

MS KEARY: - - - direct.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay. And I guess with home language other than English rather than non-English speaking background you're trying to get to a positive rather than a negative.

MS KEARY: Yes. And - - -

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Is that it?

20 MS KEARY: Yes. Also, we're saying that we want to support children in developing their full linguistic repertoire and that supporting children to not only use but to develop their home languages in early childhood education is an aim in its own right. It's not just a bridge for learning English, having other languages. And it's about identity development and forming partnerships with families and communities.

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Are you seeing these as almost dedicated or specialist early childhood education and care services? Or are you seeing this as almost a universal capability across the whole sector?

30 MS KEARY: We would see it more as a universal capability. We believe that if there was upskilling and more space in teacher education courses for units on language acquisition and second language acquisition, and engagement with the needs of English language learners. And talking about taking a home language approach to learning, other languages, such as
35 English. That would be the better way to go so that all educators and teachers become upskilled in this field. And having also – we have the preschool field officers. So maybe to have a dedicated preschool field officer who works in this field as well.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You mentioned around, in your comments on the education and training, carry on in training, at least a part of it, to the needs of (indistinct). And that's an interesting perspective and I wondered if you want to talk a little bit more. Because we haven't heard a lot about people commenting on the course content for the educators or teachers - - -

45 MS KEARY: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - extending beyond the child. And so you're perhaps, the first, at least for me, which is actually – it's as valid or at least a component of the education and training of the educators is as valid to engage the families of the children and perhaps, even maybe moreso talking about the home languages, et cetera. So I just wondered if you could talk a little bit more about that.

10 MS KEARY: Well, I guess building relationships, collaborative relationships and partnerships underpins the early years learning framework. And I come from a teacher education background myself and we have units on partnerships in early childhood education.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

15 MS KEARY: Which would include partnerships with families, growing partnerships with families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and with all families as well as with organisations and community bodies who can support your work.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS KEARY: In your particular local context as well.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Yes.

30 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Thanks Anne. You also mentioned teachers aids but we don't really have those in ECEC. We have, you know, we just have a number of (indistinct). But it was interesting because I mean if you had people with language skills but not within the ratio though, I mean, it's a sort of an interesting potential model, I guess, and filled from the community or – and I guess we see it in some – we've seen it in one Indigenous community, where they – the people from the community who weren't – didn't have the qualifications but were working in the centre.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: In the centre

40 COMMISSIONER GROPP: In the centre. This was under a different arrangement, to the block funding arrangement. But have you – I mean have you seen that? I mean you see it in schools I guess but - - -

45 MS KEARY: Well, I guess, showing my age, I have worked in bilingual education in Indigenous communities as a preschool teacher, and the model that I worked in I had two local teaching associates, we called them. And I supported those teaching associates with planning and implementing a program so that the program was in the local language and English became the additional language. So there's a lot of different models that we can draw on and I guess it depends on the context.

5 COMMISSIONER GROPP: We certainly recommended that with drawing people from and we've sort of focused on Indigenous communities. It could be, go to other communities where to get people from that community to train and become ECEC workers.

MS KEARY: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: But to recognise their knowledge and their, you know, and their experience, et cetera, as a way of – and more different ways of training, et cetera, to encourage them into the sector.

15 MS KEARY: And to be able to offer programs which cater for teaching associates to upskill, whether it's a certificate or educator or teacher level which are community-based as well. So that they don't always have to leave their community to be able to access this ongoing education in the field. Or maybe it's a little bit of both coming for intensive courses but being able to outside their community but be able to undertake much of that training within their community.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It's an interesting observation around accelerated learning programs don't always work. We're very interested and concerned around the number of people who are enrolling but a very, very high number who don't end up completing. And yet we are struggling to find the right number of adequately trained educators and teachers to work in the sector. People are walking through the door but they're not – or will put their toe in the door but they don't come through - - -

30 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Come back out the door.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and they're going back out. And that's an interesting observation, particularly for certain skill sets. You also mentioned around language-based plain learning – well, sorry, place-based language learning.

35 MS KEARY: Play-based.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Play-based language learning. I think was the – it was something along those lines. And I just – well, you might want to clarify for me but also it struck me as that felt like a very specific approach to learning and I wondered whether you had a view around whether the national quality framework currently adequately covers off on these issues that you're referring to and so I was just wondering if you wanted to talk a little bit about that?

45 MS KEARY: Yes. And I think that's the point that we did make in our submission as well. We believe that the National Quality Framework could

be developed further in that area. It talks about the call for competence, but again we'd like the visibility of language - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Language - - -

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MS KEARY: - - - to come in. Often We've found in a number of government reports we have been able to respond to, that language gets subsumed by culture and it gets lost. And the visibility gets lost and then English language learners get lost in the - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Okay.

MS KEARY: Yes. So we'd just like to make more visible the linguistic diversity within our communities. And that English language learning just doesn't occur by osmosis, but that teachers and educators need to have some – be upskilled in this area and that intentional teaching, planning and implementation of approaches to support English language learners can occur within a play-based approach.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It's interesting and thanks for – we've similarly reflected on where we've seen a lack of use of broader, wider languages almost excluding and in particular it's – I think an example we can pick up, is Aboriginal languages for training material that is impenetrable even for a well-trained English speaker, let alone somebody who's natural or home language is, in fact, not English. And then you're extending that into both learning in the environment with the children and the educators, and that's a very interesting perspective.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It's really interesting.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And you make the point which I think is quite valid around the very large number of – (indistinct) recent arrivals into Australia who will undoubtedly come with already existing language skills and are we incorporating that into the learning. So I think that's really (indistinct).

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MS KEARY: And again, I think I'd like to really emphasise that notion of partnerships with the families and communities as well.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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MS KEARY: In that.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: In your submission, Anne, you say that – well, I mean, one of your recommendations is for reporting on, you know, what languages are – people are speaking, children are speaking. But there must be data gaps. I guess you use the census or something like that at the

45

moment. But have you got any sense of what – how much of a barrier this is to families accessing it - - -

MS KEARY: Do you mean what the scale of - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. So what are, you know, I mean obviously it could be varied, but do you have any sense of what that – how many families that are that fixed in? Or how important it is to barrier?

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MS KEARY: This is where research is needed in the field. It is an under-researched area. And this is where we're advocating for the terminology because often families get hidden under the term LBOTE, Language Backgrounds Other Than English, and we realised that many of those – or some of those families actually are raising their children in English language homes because it may be only one family member who is from the LBOTE background, or these families may actually speak English in the home. So it's had to get data on the area. But we do have anecdotal evidence about the challenges. For example, newly arrived refugee families. We did some research with these families and service providers. And the women talked about how they can access English language – they can access childcare while they're receiving adult migrant education programs, while they're enrolled in those programs.

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But sometimes the language barrier gets in the way where between the different systems, Centrelink, childcare, that the families don't have access to those childcare once they've completed their hours of AMEP. And families have been left with bills for thousands of dollars because they've continued to access childcare, and we have an adult education provider who has supported those families to access help to – because of these bills that they've acquired.

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So there's sort of anecdotal evidence in the field – little pockets of where language barriers not only for the children but for the families.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So in that situation where the families have access to subsidised ECEC for the purpose of undertaking the English language courses.

MS KEARY: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But then their children remained in the services at the - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: They didn't make that clear in their - - -

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Of course, yes.

MS KEARY: Or they didn't understand the full ramifications - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Well, that they'd - - -

5 MS KEARY: - - - of what had happened and, you know, childcares are very
overloaded with the work that they do and to communicate with all families,
and when there's a language barrier it can be challenging. And that's the
same with the inclusion support program as well. Sometimes the time and
effort, as you say, gets put into high-priority areas, such as with disabilities.
10 And even though English language learners may meet the criteria for
inclusion support, often they're very low down on the list and to make an
application it is very challenging.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We've almost run out of time. Is there
anything else that you wanted to address with us today?

MS KEARY: No. I think it's just to advocate for the visibility of English
language learners and their families and their communities and that we also
acknowledge the rich home languages that these children and families are
bringing with them to early childhood education and care.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Well, we very much appreciate this and
your time today. You've brought a broader perspective and that really it's
important for us to hear the richness of this and we don't dismiss the
importance of what you're saying here we, of course, agree with the general
25 proposition, supporting children and families with different backgrounds is
(indistinct).

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It is a fresh perspective that you've brought
us today. Thank you very much.

30 MS KEARY: Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thanks, Anne.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thanks, Anne. I might just pause our hearing
for the moment and take a 10-minute break, or 15-minute break I think it is.
So we might not be back – we'll reconvene at 10.45. So thank you everybody
who is online and everybody else who has joined us in the room and we'll be
back shortly.

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SHORT ADJOURNMENT [10.30 AM]

45 **RESUMED** [10.45 AM]

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you. We'll reconvene now. Our next guest in the public hearings for your benefit and we spoke about this a bit earlier this morning, but there's an official transcript being taken and so – there will be people potentially online who we can't necessarily see but it is a public hearing. it's open to all. And for all your benefit to anyone here, but I'm Martin Stokie, I'm one of the presiding Commissioners responsible for our inquiry into early childhood education and care joined by Deborah Brennan, I beg your pardon, on my right. And Lisa Gropp on my left.

We're going to hand over to yourselves very shortly. For the transcript, it will be helpful just to say your name and the organisation. And you're welcome to give an introductory statement or perspective. If you don't have one, that's perfectly fine, we can just launch into the specific things. We have our draft report out with recommendations and a series of , sort of, information requests and I'm happy to talk about or hear your views on any or all of those.

And the final point is, we welcome and thank you for the time that you've taken to both engage with us previously, but also to make submissions to the inquiry. It is incredibly helpful for us, but it's also it's on the public record and it's helpful for all the people who are participating and engaging in this process. So over to you and we're in your hands.

MR CAMERON: Great. Thank you very much. My name's Andrew Cameron. I'm the CEO of the Early Learning Association of Australia.

MR HURST: I'm Noah Hurst and I'm the Senior Advisor of Advocacy and Sector Engagement at Early Learning Association of Australia.

MR CAMERON: If it's okay what I might do is just take a few minutes just to walk through five key areas of interest that we wanted to put into the conversation today. Just quickly summarising, Early Learning Association of Australia has a keen interest in kindergarten and preschool services from the ECEC sector, that is the predominant face of our membership. And we have about 1460 services which are covered by that membership.

In terms of the interim report provided by the commission really valuable, really delves into that complexity and it wants the solutions. We enjoy the read and we see the challenges you're grappling with and are grateful you're doing so.

Five areas we wanted to quickly highlight upfront. The first for us being the extension of the childcare subsidy of preschool and kindergarten for us would be a significant and meaningful change. That would create additional capacity within the sector but also would leverage the opportunity afforded it by transformation happening in the kindergarten and preschool space, across

multiple jurisdictions. So it's an area we're keen to see improvement on and we're really supportive of seeing that reflected in the interim report.

5 The activity test has been assessed through the interim report. And, really, we're focused on that. We'd encourage the Commissioners to go a step further than altering the activity test to removing the activity test. An activity test, really, as we're seeing it, is impacting those who are most in need, on lowest wages, the most in need of support through the ECEC system. And so

10 wanting to see potentially some more progressive change there.
Coinvestment in wages. We recognise that and through your report, there was active assessment of teachers and educators and the values that they bring to the sector. Really important from our point of view that educator workforce is actively supported and we're aware their wages have been over
15 time lower and haven't been tied to school sector changes. So seeing the ECEC sector having the potential to leverage off some co-investment between the Commonwealth and the States to support that critical workforce.

20 You recall I mentioned on multiple occasions, the effectiveness of teachers. However, those teachers much of the work that drives their effectiveness is completed by the educators collecting data, generating activity to feed on to those tasks they're completing. And workforce development, I want to see professional development in that complex environment that both teachers and educators on both operating in, whether it be children engaging with the child
25 protection system, whether it would be the services which had different pedagogy approaches they're trying to align.

A fourth point I want to quickly raise. On stewardship. The concept of
30 stewardship has flagged in the interim report is really positive and we see great benefits in it. Regards to the commission has continued to think about managing the market to increase quality. Penalties in this space and penalising persistent non-performers is something that's a challenge around. We're really looking to see active intervention from ACECQA and other
35 providers via improvements in quality. And then tie, obviously, any decisions around expansion within the sector to services which have demonstrated capacity to deliver quality prior to seeing demand and quality being the drivers for services being established.

40 And, finally, I just point to the ECEC Commission as a concept. Yes. We can see the merits in the arguments that have been proposed around the ECEC Commission, but also flag some concerns around a very complicated environment and looking to see that the Commonwealth has the capacity, drive and universal access agenda within the existing jurisdictional and inter-governmental arrangements, there is capacity for improvement there, is the
45 commission going to be a further complication or is it going to be a solution? That's something that we want to provide some feedback on. We weren't sure as yet, (indistinct). They were the five areas highlighted and we wanted to

flag for the Commissioners and hopefully, the submission will frame the conversations.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, first of all, thank you. Quite distinct and very interesting areas. How do you want to rank them, we'll go from top to bottom, or if there is one of those that you want to absolutely nail or how would you like to go?

10 MR CAMERON: For us to really nail the topics (indistinct) being extended to - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Why don't we go there then? That was your first point, so CCS in various preschools. What do you mean there?

15 MR CAMERON: So we have an understanding in the way that kindergartens and preschools operate, and they are special, and the families are often looking for a more holistic service which meets their family's needs. So we have a desire for people to work full days and to gain additional days of work. Yet, kindergartens have historically been part days, or limited days
20 during the week. These services have capacity within the existing space set up to actually extend those services out. But currently, those services are made available on a fee-for-service basis to families or additional care beyond kindergarten.

25 That for us presents as an opportunity to make more opportunities to help families which are community-controlled, based locally and seeing the opportunity to expand those services.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So we talked about potentially having – that's what it was called wrap-around services for the – and extending the childcare subsidy to those hours outside of the preschool, kinder or sessional arrangement. Is that what you mean?

35 MR CAMERON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay.

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Do we just get a tick for that? Or is there something we've missed there?

MR CAMERON: I think you're getting a tick for that, and probably want to highlight that we see it being something which is potentially more transformational - - -

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MR CAMERON: - - - than an add-on.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

MR CAMERON: It's a sector which has - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Do you want to expand a little bit on that point?

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It won't work now because?

MR CAMERON: So currently we have services which operate – not for profit services which operate on a basis where they're barely profitable, if based on current funding arrangements. We have those services based in the markets where we find it is most difficult to get access to childcare. We have those services often operating where there are families which have lesser availability of resources to fund the care and support.

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So, given that – given the separate agenda running around increasing funding for kindergarten services and hours of care, that transforms kindergartens from day-to-day bit part contributor to being a significant contributor to the hours of care available each week. And so that topping and tailing of some additional hours of care which are funded by CCS – yes. The logic stands, but the impact in those communities, in those markets, for us is something we're trying to reinforce the point so that we see it as being of no effect.

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MR HURST: I think it's worth mentioning also that it's very beneficial, especially for those who have got to go to work, yes? So we've got members but offer these additional hours of care, but they actually subsidise it themselves. And one of our members they have been doing that for the past two years, they're about to enter, I think, actually, this year is the first year they won't be able to offer families those subsidised hours that they're funding themselves as an organisation. And we've heard from families about how much this will actually impact their lives, they're not going to be accessing work as often.

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So we really just wanted to reiterate the point that we made in our actual submission, which we were very grateful that it was picked up by you. And just say it's really important, and it is being utilised at the moment, seeing as there would have been a system in place for the services, it was important to do so, would be beneficial - - -

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: You gave us some very telling examples in your original submission.

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MR HURST: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Or really, around services who have tried to do this and then because there's slight changes to enrolment, they were no longer eligible. So I think, hopefully, this written submission certainly was picked up by us and hopefully being discussed goes some way to – or a long towards addressing those concerns.

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: So you think it's further support that would be required? Because I mean they would be receiving via the CCS the funding for the hours that they've – you know - - -

MR HURST: However, it's based on what you've picked up. I don't think we've got anything additional to add on it.

15 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Okay.

MR HURST: We're just reiterating our strong support for this point. Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Okay

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Maybe then drill down into aspects of detail and see your views on different variations on this theme. Sessional kinder or kinders will provide a service to a particular age cohort, long daycare in the main provides to a much broader aged cohort, providing wrap-around service to sessional kinder or kinder services allows, at least, for that age cohort to almost mimic and start to converge towards – however, the lack of a better description and like a centre-based daycare type service as in it's an expanded service that caters for parents and children of an age group.

30 If we gave that wrap-around capacity to cater for the parents' needs, do you think then there should be a complementary obligation or expectation to also provide services to a younger cohort? And so that's my first question, and I maybe preface that by saying, we have heard from others, which is, 'No. No. That expansion of the wrap-around is just going to suck children out of our service into a different service. And we're going to be left with the higher cost, lower younger children, which has higher ratios and given that the ages are, you know, almost the most significant cost of any of these services.' It's as before anyway, so it's a little of detail what age cohort or do you not see, 'Don't change anything. Just give us the wrap-around.'

40 MR HURST: So I fully see it and I understand that concern that they may have. We're more looking at it as an access perspective. So there's existing infrastructure limitations that we know especially in traditional settings.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Yes.

MR HURST: It's about utilising those existing infrastructure, like, that that's there rather than looking at just expanding that. So if you turn it into a larger age group we know that's more children, more space that doesn't actually exist. This is about providing this in market areas that have the limitations to be able to allow parents to access the time that they need, so they can get back into the workforce.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sure.

MR HURST: So that member that I mentioned earlier, they operate three different services in a very remote part of Victoria. One of those is a long daycare service that has, what is it, mixed age groups from zero to four. So they've got enrolments – a waiting list that's very, very long because the parents want to access those additional hours. Whereas the two preschools' parents don't want to go to the other one, they only do it if they have to because they can't meet the conditions of getting the additional support.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Okay. And we accept that. In fact, part of our recommendation is that looking at infrastructure that's perhaps, sitting idle - - -

MR HURST: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and parents who have needs and children who have desires, and that's a matching problem, and if the recommendations can help lead to a better matching of available services, capability and parents and children's needs, then that's a plus.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: I'll just go on from that. And just have you any sense of – when you're talking about remote areas where you – or in regional areas – but it's saying urban areas, do you think, and how much of this will taken up or are parents already just voting with their feet a bit? And if they need those longer hours, they're already in centre-based daycare. And if they're happy for shorter sessions if they choose the – I mean I'm just getting your perspective on that.

MR CAMERON: It's a real mixed bag. There are parents who've made choices and they're using kindergarten programs through modern daycare providers. So what we're seeing is that there is opportunity for – to better meet parents' needs within the existing changes of profile substantially.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: But the numbers – you're not talking about a great expansion and (indistinct).

MR CAMERON: You're quite right.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

MR CAMERON: And, you know, and you're probably – in terms of expansion because a large proportion of providers we're talking about are not for profit. That expansion of profile right now is not new facilities, new capital, there's a serious limitation around the availability of capital of providers, but it's maximising – utilising - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: You said preschools and different preschools are pretty much full up. That now they haven't got spare capacity or - - -

MR CAMERON: There is capacity in the system, but there is funding drivers for kindergartens, which is to maximise enrolments to make sure they maximise the potential viability of services. so falling away from those maximum enrolments in turn is a challenge. But across the State, and I'm listening to all our members, there are stories of services which are in Docklands, here in Melbourne, which are running well below capacity because there's been a change in people's mobility around – post-COVID - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Workers working in - - -

MR CAMERON: Exactly. And then we've got regional areas where they've got significant additional capacity, but the capacity is not aligning with every requirement especially when there's significant travel needed to get to and from work, and so sessional kindergarten being potentially an ill-fit, if there's only the half days available.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: With expansion of, you know, say from 600 to doubling that to, you know, 30 hours a week, I mean, that would also, I mean, but would also, I mean, what's the – get more success at the centre, I guess, but is that longer days or spread across five days a week? I mean how would that be determined?

MR CAMERON: Yes. Across five days a week.

MR HURST: (Indistinct) overburden a child's development.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. With all that (indistinct) for the program.

MR HURST: And you get that buy-in from parents and families as well, I think the centre – that we're going extend to having very long days, and I don't think there's a lot of interest there.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

MR HURST: It is more about expanding your costs - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct) and I think part of the core of our recommendations is giving options - - -

MR HURST: Yes.

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MR CAMERON: - - - rather than – we're not mandating anything. But if the service can't afford it, and if there isn't availability, then I mean there are – it's constrained choice.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I did have another question from me which is part of around that scope question which is, okay, find challenges around different age groups. We see in the kinder and the preschool program, effectively, it aligns school to – and, yes. parents' needs would generally be younger children is – and if they're working extends over a full year. So are you envisaging a program if we can have, I think, you know if it's approved and accepted with a recommendation and around the wrap-around that the program in those services would then extend for a fuller year or would it stay within – we need to see wrap-around kind of suggests before and after – a bit like OSHC. But OCHC also runs a holiday program, and so they've been able to run. So I'm just interested in making sure we understand, people use language here and it's – they talk about a free kinder, but it's only free for certain hours, for certain days, for certain weeks. Like, it's not really free.

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MR CAMERON: There's probably there's two parts that answers that question. The first part is the funding structures to date have heavily influenced the structure and operations of services.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Within a group.

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MR CAMERON: So that has meant that there probably has been limited flexibility for experimentation.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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MR CAMERON: But what we've seen at recent times in markets where there is capacity for parents to pay, there are early experimenters within the sector who are trialling these school holiday programs operating outside of the 10 week term or indeed, Saturday - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay.

MR CAMERON: And so it's experimentation there – a real appetite from parents and families to see those experiments as successful, but it's early.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MR CAMERON: Because the funding model doesn't currently support that in markets - - -

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No.

MR CAMERON: - - - where there isn't any - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: And so like say the weekend, that's fully paid for by the parents?

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MR CAMERON: That's right. That's right. And obviously, the funding model then increases, the costs increase with that over time, et cetera. But, yes, they affect services.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And quite likely, presumably, that that child isn't going six days a week. They're just going – but that's the day in which the parents particularly need additional support, and it's good for the child.

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MR CAMERON: Yes. absolutely. So, yes, that's seeing that, as we've said, in those first comments a bit more transformation potentially because the sector which has been quite constrained by this, the funding model has defined its operating model which is limited its capacity.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But also, it also allows families to choose a community-managed service for longer hours which is a choice that's been taken away - - -

MR CAMERON: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - from all other families in recent decades.

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MR HURST: I think a point that you made that's really important to underpin all of this thinking that we're doing right now is that about not introducing any further limitations. I think where we can introduce flexibilities so that services can actually talk to their community, learn what their needs are and address that, I think that is that that's to change they could come out of this.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: A strong message we're getting is about getting engagement, community – I'd be exaggerating to say a lot of people are talking about co-design, but certainly community engagement in the matrices of services that are provided.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We've heard it very loudly in relation to – particularly in relation to the remote working mothers.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And the under-served and unserved markets which is that – and then when we've been thinking, well, okay we want to have more services and capacity, potentially if there's building things, but if the building is already there, in the position that they're employing people, if the employees are already there maybe we can solve this. Which is where we come from and listening to others, which is potentially some changes which at the moment put things relatively modest but, in fact, transformational is what you're saying.

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15 MR HURST: (Indistinct) hours as well in those remote communities, if you're now able to work another day because your service can, you're also increasing productivity for the existing workforce.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Absolutely.

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MR HURST: So, as you said, it might not be a massive change but it is transformational and those little tweaks add up.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And for those individuals, for those children, and for those families that it's, you know, it's (indistinct).

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MR HURST: Yes. Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Have we done CCS and let's get on to the - - -

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MR CAMERON: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Activity test.

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MR CAMERON: So the activity test is – it seems like quite a simple point to us, we recognise we're government and we recognise social security assisting the activity test. But the activity just seems unhelpful with respect to thinking about how the ECEC sector operates and how it contributes to universal access agenda and contributes to meaningfully ensuring that families can get access to the level of support they need, so they can maximise their economic contribution. They should have access to support that fits with their circumstances and particularly for vulnerable families. And did you have further comment to make about - - -

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MR HURST: I think just in addition to what we've said and in print as well, I think that's interesting finding the intricacy findings around the certain

families that have zero to under \$100,000.00 of income are those that are making up the highest percentage that are accessing subsidised care. I just think that's an additional point to say that clearly that's not working, and we just don't believe that it's actually increasing productivity and I think that it's worth getting rid of. And you just look at hours and that universal care model that we're pitching. So how can we fund two or three days a week so all parents will be able to access that? That will encourage them to have time to do things like work, study, so why do we need to limit - - -

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. It's something that we're certainly giving consideration to.

MR HURST: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And we've had representations around completely getting rid of the activity test. One of our considerations is the rollout of reform measures and not overwhelming the system with demand that would, perhaps, particularly come from families who have already secured a place within the system who could but indeed extend their use. So
20 it's a complicated issue for us that we're thinking about and that we are certainly actively considering that question.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: We're doing some quantitative work on this, just to see who – because it might be we look at it – that what we propose to
25 do does a lot of the heavy lifting in which case there may not be – well, I'm not saying you wouldn't do it, but it may not have as much fiscal impact or even depends who's left, you know, because people at the higher income may be working – higher incomes – working longer hours already, so it doesn't really affect them anyway. So it's sort of – but it's going to work through
30 that, see what the impacts will be.

MR CAMERON: (Indistinct).

MR HURST: I say that that's good. And I understand why that would be a
35 difficulty to roll out.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: But you're right. I mean – and our own work shows it, that the people who are mainly affected are those on lower incomes. So, yes.

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Variable incomes.

45 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. Ones that work the odd work patterns.

MR HURST: Single mothers – that sort of thing.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Single mothers and we spoke with them yesterday.

5 MR HURST: Yes.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Absolutely. But there are other things needed. It's not just the activity test that's the hours of operation et cetera for them as well.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Do you have a sense of phasing? Like is your recommendation to scrap it, but use it – scrap it tomorrow or is it over, you know, is there a timing? Can you see adverse consequences if you do it tomorrow, what that would mean which is along the lines of what people are saying or are you saying, 'No we don't see that. That's not the issue.'

15

MR CAMERON: From the point of view of our membership and the conversations we've had and the feedback we've received, there hasn't been an active conversation around barriers, this being potentially across the broader extents of sector, if you ask great barriers to be considered. But from our membership's point of view, this wasn't something which was considered hugely problematic.

20

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Is that because your members are seated like, to selection bias? You've seen the ones who are using it, they've obviously satisfied the activity test, so it's not a barrier. And the people who aren't using it aren't coming, and they're excluded and therefore, they're not telling – they're not talking to you.

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30 COMMISSIONER GROPP: How many preschoolers has it deemed anyways?

MR HURST: We have other members outside of preschool as well - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. Yes. So you have the members.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay.

MR HURST: But I do see, that's (indistinct) if it's tomorrow. I know it wouldn't be tomorrow, but I think it is something that would be changed with additional considerations around work and employment that can be applied with it.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

45

MR HURST: - - - can be applied with the – would that need to be an additional consideration for our work and what they’ve already thought of with their employment - - -

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MR HURST: - - -based on how (indistinct).

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: I’m pretty sure that, while we – while that also shows you a number of – because of this matching of work with hours that for a number of users, it’s about used but unsubsidised hours and so that would just - - -

15 MR CAMERON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: It might be for those who will help them financially without necessarily putting – for that wouldn’t put great burden on the system, there’s – they’re using it now - - -

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But mostly they don’t even understand the thing is actually hurting - - -

25 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. It’s actually that. But then with this group, you’ve got around preliminary modelling and they’re just doing more modelling. But it was quite uplifting ending in children using ECEC who aren’t in the system now, which we’re – quite a welcome outcome.

30 MR HURST: And there’s been great movements in NDIA, CCS space as well, looking at definitions to access it, why and things like that. I recognise there are some positives for the families already in the system.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Coinvest in wages.

35 MR CAMERON: Now, this is probably one of the more complicated ones.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You don’t think we’re already doing that?

40 MR CAMERON: And so there’s, obviously, intergovernmental arrangements for the funding of (indistinct words) support the sector. This is probably trying to get at one of the bigger, more complicated problems. One of the elements of responsibility is to be with the employer representative for preschools and kindergartens in Victoria via an industrial agreement. Wages for educators, recognising the challenges we have, while workforce perspective recognising the need for continued uplift and capability presents as being an enduring issue. That no one jurisdiction that can solve in its own right.

45

This being a challenge that I think it presents the opportunity with it to have a discussion around (indistinct) and to ensure that this is a sustainable system moving forward. With a particular focus report today around kindergarten and preschool, we're seeing increasing with hours, increasing of costs, yet we're seeing continuing churn in the workforce, and there's more than one factor that drives to enforce stability, the wage is clearly one of the big factors and this is low level remunerated occupation.

MR HURST: And we can look at what's going on with multi-enterprise bargaining, for sure. But existing enterprise agreements such as the (indistinct) here, that's been around for quite a while, there needs to be, I guess, some assurance that if there is an investment in the multi-enterprise bargaining process that existing enterprise agreements can actually also utilise that funding for educators. Because we get a boost from the Victorian Government around teacher leavers but unfortunately there is limitations around how much extra wages can and should be provided to educators. I think if you see it happening around here, it's just going to be once again, 'I'm going to go to work here because of this.' And we see that with teachers, a lot of teachers in Victoria won't work anywhere that isn't on that tier. That isn't (indistinct), they do get this additional (indistinct). We want to try and avoid that happening in the educator system as well. So you want that to be an additional piece that strengthens, rather than becomes more – a competition between the sector.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It's probably something we haven't made as strongly about it. It's certainly occupied all of our thinking. And you'd expect it from an organisation like us, yes. incentives matter. and differences matter. and we could see it in the behaviours and, in fact, just anecdotally some of the centres that we went and saw and the staff were talking about their ambition to get across on to there – so, 'I am going to work here for a period time and then go across to there.' And if that's a universal view and I know we're talking about Victoria, but if you have this constant streaming and for relatively similar roles. So if it's certainly singular qualifications and training we've got a problem in the sector, which can't be easily resolved initially, but it's an interesting point.

And maybe just one other point about – I thought I heard you, Andrew, if it's true then we need to reflect it in our report, which is that we have acknowledged the role of teachers but not enough around educators. And that's certainly not our intention. We think that educators and teachers combined actually are the – they underpin the success of the sector, the children's outcomes, families' engagement, et cetera. So if you're reading our report and it reflects we think more about that cohort, rather than his cohort, then that's on us and we really need to take that back and have a think about have we used the right language and have we sufficiently considered that.

MR HURST: It is tricky with educators as well because we know qualification-wise it's not necessarily the most valuable like role but the responsibilities in that role are so huge - - -

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Huge.

MR HURST: They're huge. Absolutely. So it is complicated to try and reflect pay, educational level, responsibility and then make sure that it all matches up in a cohesive, nice way that people are happy. So we want to
10 acknowledge that it's rather complex.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: And especially as we're hearing from you, you know, and ourselves we sort of think there's probably more roles they can take on and we've heard about this morning, about language, you know, not
15 only just language, we've heard about, you know, including support with the NDIS - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: M'mm.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: - - - You know so it's all increasing pressures on what educators will be expected to do.

MR CAMERON: And the additional benefit of the educator workforce is it is much more responsive in our rural settings. There's a grow-your-own
25 mentality around educators in this. You find people in the local community rather than bringing in people who might leave again. Find people in the community, put them through a VET program, get them into the workforce, ensure their capability, invest in them, see those returns. It's quite a different pathway to the teacher pathway, we need both. But this is recognising and
30 acknowledging - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's a really interesting observation about the grow-your-own mentality. Is that – do you have any data on that? Or is that - - -
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MR HURST: You can look at the Universities Accord about that and how it's worth making sure that TAFE and VET and things are stronger in those spaces, so they actually don't leave because we definitely hear a lot of stories of people - - -
40

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Leaving?

MR HURST: - - - to get an education and then they just don't come back because they don't see the benefit. So if you can strengthen those sorts of programs out there as well.
45

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MR CAMERON: And we talked to incentives which you mentioned are keenly of interest. There have been significant incentives made available to recruit into rural and more remote services. But those incentives don't
5 translate into long tenure of employment necessarily. So (indistinct) the grow-your-own mentality might – there hasn't been a huge amount of data around this, but anecdotally, talking to our rural members, this gives a strategy and choice at the moment. Because it's the – within a tight labour market, this is a logical way of going about building a workforce.

10

MR HURST: I don't claim to be an expert on this but I'll see if I can't answer any follow-up questions.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. That's fine.

15

MR HURST: But I also think it's worth mentioning that intent of growing your own, you also need to look at how can you incentivise migrants to want to settle and stay. And how can we look at certain limitations around migrants that are studying, and how to travel into certain locations to get the
20 number of contact hours?

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay.

MR HURST: To make sure that they actually don't need to do those five
25 hours of travel because that de-incentivises them to actually want to go out to a rural service. And actually, create their own communities in an existing community and build that growth. So grow your own, but also allow us to join the community and be incentivised to do so.

25

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Well, we're interested in all these sorts of innovative ideas of how we tweak some of the existing arrangements and make them more – I suppose, they're context-specific in understanding what's actually going on, rather than, 'Well, I just need to you to get that experience and I don't care about anything else, go away and do it until I can give you a
35 tick.'

35

Just before we move on, on the stewardship and the commission, on co-investing in wage, and I was a bit flippant when I said, aren't we already doing that? But in reality, we are, you know, the childcare subsidy or the preschool payments are a payment, not just for wages, but for all things, but
40 there is co-invest – and I presume what you mean by co-invest is from the government, rather than the parents, we could charge so they can – outside of, you know, State government – or State government funded preschool arrangements.

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What do you actually mean by co-invest in this current context? Can you give us a little bit more detail about that? Is it just that the quantity isn't

enough, and the conditions aren't generous enough? Is that the fundamental issue here? What does it claim?

5 MR CAMERON: So with having multiple bargaining processes happening in different jurisdictions, you have interdependencies between them, but not direct relationships. When we have the funding apparatus between levels of government, there is obviously capacity to leverage those for our own benefit. But the point at the end of the day, going to how you introduced the question, it is a very lean model. And it's incredibly lean, which means that
10 in terms of co-investment, what we're trying to say, is there capacity to create, within the existing structures of funding, the ability to provide for wages? Whether it be via bargaining processes and support – various processes, whether it be for the total quantity that allows all services to be funded on a permanent basis, which allows for thrive as opposed to survive,
15 which is commonly the way in ECEC services – especially not for profit services, tend to be operated it's a, sort of, very high loaded cost (indistinct). And so trying to find the avenues to work out that conversation. So it's a specific mechanism we're taking to instead of trying to see it across the various mechanisms right now, by which wages are set and funded through
20 various avenues.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Do you think those different awards should converge over time? Is that the ambition or - - -

25 MR CAMERON: There's no doubt - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Are there artificial distinctions that we have or are they legitimate distinctions?

30 MR CAMERON: There's little doubt that the current structure of the awards and agreements is historic, rather than being setting the ECEC sector up for success moving forward. And so there's going to be one mechanism or another over the next decade to – transformation in terms of how those awards and agreements are currently structured. They will reach their expiry
35 expectation, and of those including ourselves, who work with those areas.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: I was going to - - -

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Go.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: - - - go to the ECEC Commission, and you've express some – sorry.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. No.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Was I stealing your thunder?

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. No. I was looking to the – if we'd finish this topic (indistinct).

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: (Indistinct words)

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Keep going.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Go to the commission and - - -

10 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes. And you express some, you know, on the one hand, on the other hand, and that will this just add another layer of complexity or will it solve some complexity. I mean, we certainly don't want to it to add to the complexity, that's not our objective. But how it's designed and what roles it would undertake, we saw it as a bit of a coordinating type of function, in particular with different levels of government where you've
15 got gaps, sort of, coordinating research, a whole range of things that were suggested. But where do you think it could, perhaps, go wrong, I guess? What's your concern?

20 MR CAMERON: Very good question. Currently, in terms of the obvious intergovernmental, or Commonwealth or State agency-based engagements we have around leadership, et cetera, there's the capacity to optimise within the current set of arrangements. We're at a point of huge reform whether it's State-based or Federal, there's a desire to see services changing, and adopting
25 new and better ways of operating to see the quality agenda continue to move forward. So given we have all of these current structures in place, currently the optimisation agenda, then the rebuild agenda, from our point of view, seems to be the preferable way.

30 Could it be in five years' time once we've seen through the current reform agenda that the commission might have a capacity to provide more stable and coherent leadership, perhaps? But at this point in time, having the Commonwealth leading conversations, using the national governmental frameworks to create coherence, I would wonder whether a commission
35 would actually complicate it because those existing conversations are so numerous, that a commission to actually be across all those areas of activity, across all those jurisdictions, would be quite difficult to navigate for those, in particular, but to others who are trying to find their main influence in these multiple streams of activity concurrently.

40

So you might argue that the opposite is true, that a commission would solve that problem, right? But from our point of view, that would seem to be a logical place at this point in time, given the circumstance that we find ourselves (indistinct).

45

COMMISSIONER GROPP: So if it's about figuring out roles and responsibilities – to that, sort of framework, I think that's probably what we –

I need to actually figure out first. And then we've talked about people having different views around what that might encompass, or what it might look like, but there has to be some, kind of, coming together around that. And that has to be done fairly early on. But then once they, sort of, settled, then the
5 commission could have an ongoing role, ensuring that, you know, we would envisage that would be around – well - ACECQA would continue but where they would sit, that it was within or, you know, whether you build on that. But we're certainly going to focus on areas of, you know, say, thin markets, and making sure that children who were missing out, who have not – and
10 advising around that, advising around research, but not necessarily doing the research yourself. And monitoring to ensure that whatever was agreed, that was delivered. So I guess they were some of the things we were really thinking around. But - - -

15 MR CAMERON: If I could give you one further piece of information. The quality of the leadership we experience from State and Federal government (indistinct), there's active conversations, there's interesting collaboration. This isn't always the case, but in this sector, I find it's been a really positive
20 array of (indistinct) improvements. There's a lot of positives there that leadership brings currently. So that presents as a reorganising that equation to create that leadership and accountability and that focus for research. (Indistinct words).

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: If I may say, that's a Victorian perspective, and not all (indistinct) have a say in leadership within the sector. And I think I'm hearing from some of your comments, a hesitation that we could lose time or lose momentum in setting up a commission, and you want governments to do their job. But I guess that the counter view is we're hearing that there is no active stewardship of the system at the moment.
30 There are initiatives, there are States moving forward with particular directions. We've got a Commonwealth Government with particular ambition, but something needs to bring all of this together. So that's, kind of, what we're juggling.

35 MR HURST: I think we saw that in the South Australian Royal Commission finding as well. But I think it's really important to relook at the roles and responsibilities of each jurisdiction, have that conversation, and then once that's actually decided, then see if there is room for a commission that can streamline that. I see we've already got quality and regulation with the help
40 of ACECQA, we've got CCYP around child protection. The role would only have to really be around accessibility and, I guess, sharing of communication and how inter-governments relate. Because I think we also need to talk about local government, the role that they play, and understanding their market. And I think the communications between the three are a little bit flawed
45 because there's a misunderstanding of who's responsible for what, what level of doing for - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And jurisdictional differences as well.

5 MR HURST: Absolutely. And I wonder if that is perhaps, a role of the Commonwealth to reassess what everyone's roles and responsibilities are in collaboration with each other, and then working on a path forward. Rather than it be someone come in, and then we look at every single process in it and we set it up, and whether that looks like this, this, this or this, and it might prolong real achievement that we've got the momentum to get right now.

10

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Well, appreciate your perspective, yes.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: In the thing that's the bigger for me. One thing we haven't really talked about is stewardship, market management. You made a point around challenging us to think about, not so much penalties, but active performance and better performance and maybe you wanted to touch on this.

20 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And you took us back to the New Zealand (indistinct) as well.

25 MR HURST: Yes. The New Zealand model is looking at if you want to expand, and you want to become a service provider in this area, you need to show that you can deliver quality and that you can actually meet the market needs in the area. So rather than just expanding for profitability, we're looking at expansion based on community need, and I think that's really important. And so that we don't keep seeing these – well, that they were the serial underperformers, I think it's good to show that we can improve quality, and we can show that we continue to drive that. When it comes to the serial

30 underperformer part, I worry the burden that that label may, like, bring on to potential workforce, knowing that they're working for a serial underperformer, rather than actually finding the root cause, finding the reason how this happened.

35 You don't want to ever remove people coming in and ensuring that quality needs to be met, whether that's introducing more management higher ratios, et cetera. But further penalising them seems like it's not really solving a problem. It's rather just penalising and punishing. I think looking at those in the area that achieve quality, see if they can be funded to bring in mentorship,

40 and bring in that management to actually raise the quality of these serial underperformers is perhaps, a way that we can solve it rather than just focusing on, 'Why do you keep doing this? This is bad'.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Well the ambition ultimately is performance.

MR HURST: Yes - - -

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We would want to see. We don't want to keep (indistinct) negatives that don't really achieve the goal. And then there's trade-offs between, well, how much more money do you put into another performing area versus trying to get specific performance. And we too are equally around the – within underperformance. There might be a whole series of reasons for that, it might be location, it might be – but if it's deliberate that's of great, great concern.

10 MR HURST: I'd be – it might just be because we are in a Victorian bubble perhaps, but I would be shocked that anyone - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: (Indistinct) only Victoria.

15 MR HURST: - - - but I would be shocked that anyone would be deliberately underperforming. I don't see the benefit in deliberate underperformance. I just - - -

20 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Well, if there's not – no cost or penalties, and you can keep rolling families and taking their money, get your standards below – any standards remain below the NQS, there's a perspective.

MR CAMERON: Be nice.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you very much – sorry, Andrew, did you want to say something to us?

MR CAMERON: No. Thank you.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. We very much appreciate your time that you've spent both responding to earlier comments, your submission on our draft report. Hopefully, you can see lots of similarities in the direction that you reflected on us, and we specifically like the ideas around supporting the community-led not-for-profit capacity struggle, in my mind, why haven't they grown and delivered, and if the tweaks that potentially we're suggesting, 35 then that might be the game changer that you're reflecting on. So thank you.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you very much.

40 MR HURST: Thank you. You've done amazing.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We're yet to finish.

MR CAMERON: Thank you very much. Cheers.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Good morning.

MS LIDDLE: Good morning. How are you doing?

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Good. So we've just had to look at the
(indistinct words). Would you like to come up, you're welcome - - -

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MS LIDDLE: (Indistinct)

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, thank you for joining and we'll continue
our conversations, and very shortly I'll ask you to introduce yourself and your
organisation. We are recording this, and the transcript will be available on
our website in due course as in all public hearings. For your benefit, I'm
Martin Stokie, and one of the commissioners responsible, as well as Deborah
Brennan and Lisa Gropp. If there's no other formalities that we need, we
have around 45 or thereabouts - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: It is public, so there can be people listening in
and possibly media.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed. Indeed. Sorry, I should have
mentioned that. But we're really in your hands. We've received your very
considered submissions, so thank you for that. If there was an opening
statement or if there are specific things that you want to raise, there are some
questions we have in response to your submission. But we're a little bit in
your hands when (indistinct) with us, so.

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MS LIDDLE: Thank you, Commissioners, it's a pleasure to be here. And
certainly, as is always our custom, I'd like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri
people (indistinct words) Australia I acknowledge their ancestors, and their
leaders, and anyone listening in, and on which the lands on which you come
from (indistinct) as well. It's a gift to have an invitation to speak today, so I
thank you for that. I am the CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our
Children, as you said, my name is Catherine Liddle (indistinct), orientates me
in the central Australian regions. If anyone's not familiar, SNAICC is the
national peak for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
And we work for the rights of our children to procure their safety, their
development and their well-being.

This inquiry creates an opportunity to recentre cultural expertise of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the way we raise our children,
and by extension, the way we provide early-years services. And as you've
mentioned, SNAICC has provided two submissions to this inquiry, and of
course, is grateful to have the opportunity to share our views through various
engagement activities that underpin the draft report. It's clear from the draft
report that the Productivity Commission has carefully considered the needs of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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As you would know, and as we state constantly, as Aboriginal people we've always known what we need to create strong and healthy communities. We know that it starts with our children. Governments have for a long time spoken about the need to close the gap. ECEC reform, if done properly, has the potential to make a positive and significant impact in the life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I'll use my opening statement to emphasise some of the most critical aspects of ECEC reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

No other culture can say that they have 60,000 years of successfully raising children. Our little ones are the only children in the world who can stand on a legacy that is as strong and as resilient and as proud as this. They are also the only children in Australia to grow up in an environment where government systems and institutions were designed to (indistinct) on their culture. Successive policies have stripped away culture from our communities, undermined our traditional childrearing practices, and created the conditions that resulted in our children experiencing disproportionate disadvantage throughout their lives, particularly in their earlier years. These policies designed by others have failed us.

I won't reiterate the systemic failures our children have experienced. However, I will say these failures highlight the critical, undeniable need for our early childhood policy practices to be reformed. If governments are serious about closing the gap, they must be bold in their approach to early-years reform. They must be willing to put our children at the centre of early-years reform, not an add on, not an asterisk, not an afterthought. As recognised in the inquiry's draft report, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations, which I'll refer to as ACCOs, are crucial providers for early-years services for our children. ACCOs are built on a culture that is a critical part of our children's development, (indistinct), and self-esteem.

Long before terms like integrated hubs, and one-stop shop, were coined, ACCOs were providing integrated early-years services tailored to the needs of our children, for those in their communities. Their services were built by our communities, for our communities, and make better practices for creating strong families. ACCOs have been the leaders of holistic early childhood supports for decades, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have provided connected and holistic care for our children for millennia. For many years ACCOs have been propping up the shortcomings of the government's early-years policy, and funding approaches.

ACCOs do some of their most impactful work outside the parameters of the existing funding, and by delivering services beyond what they have been established to do. Put simply, the good work ACCO early-years services are doing within their communities is in spite of, not because of, the way the current ECEC policy funding and regulatory frameworks operate. ECEC

reform must remove the barriers that ACCO early-years providers face. ACCO early-years services require a sustainable funding model that reflects the true cost and value of the services they provide within their communities. A new funding approach must be block-based and needs-based, with a focus on flexibility of funding use, and removing administrative burden to services and to families themselves.

A new funding approach must be nationally led, to ensure equitable distribution of funding across all jurisdictions to address supply shortages for childcare deserts. We can't just tinker at the edges of this. We can't just tinker on the edges of a funding model that isn't working. This approach has failed our children, and bold large-scale reform is the only way forward. We're not saying that this has to happen overnight. We understand it will take time, and we understand it needs to be staggered, but we do need to see a pathway that will get us there.

The role of culture for our children must be recognised properly within government policy and regulatory requirements. This means embedding and acting on expertise and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, its sector and our community leadership. In practice, this means that there should be new considerations of how quality is defined for services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including significant reform of the National Quality Framework. When our children go to school, they walk into the world without their parents by their sides for the first time.

They need to be culturally strong because this is the first time they will walk into an institutional environment that considers them to be other, or worse, asks them to fight to be recognised for who they are. Our communities know what is best for our children, and a historic pattern of government organisations thinking they know what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be broken. A new ECEC Commission needs to be intentionally designed to ensure that its scope and functions are delivered in a way that respects, incorporates, and amplifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander set leadership, rather than displacing it. Thank you, again for the opportunity to appear today, and the opportunity to discuss this important reform. I'm looking forward to your questions.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And thank you for the submission, very detailed, very considered on all the aspects of our inquiry and recommendations. That's very good. Are you happy if we just, sort of, run through some of these – a lot of these points, and maybe for my colleagues, I might lead off, and it's in no particular order. But you mention a number of things, maybe we come back to the National Quality Framework, radical change is an interesting turn of phrase and one that we're very keen to hear about. We do actually ask about that. But before we get down to that level, I was wondering around ACCOs from your perspective, yes. sustainable funding, we reflect on that. Are there additional supports that are needed to

develop and bring the ACCOs to the point that they can deliver or is it just a matter of if the funding can be provided, everything else will flow?

5 MS LIDDLE: No. As you say, there are multiple things that need to be considered. So what we understand from our services, and from our communities is A, getting services in the first place is significant. B, having them funded in a way that provides the services that they need, and is accessible by families is absolutely critical. Investing in the workforce is absolutely fundamental. So we know, particularly in regional and remote
10 areas there are people screaming for access to these services, and the moment we stand them up, we see people coming into those services saying, 'I would commence a (indistinct)'. But there's not necessarily a pathway - - -

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes - - -

MS LIDDLE: - - - to ensure they're able to access it. Again, when we're looking at some of those broader system impacts over time. We know that the early childhood sector, the wages are not – they're not kind, they're not kind, and they certainly don't show the value, not only to teachers but to
20 educators as well. But we also know as we're talking about (indistinct) space, because of the current funding models, our services will not be able to afford to even function if salaries go up. So there's work that needs to be done there as well. What we also hear from our services is because of the nature of holistic care, it means we need a broader, wrap-around scope, not only for
25 parents so that we're strengthening parents at the same time, but we're strengthening what our educators might need in order to be able to deliver that holistic service to people.

Now, sometimes if we're talking about things like building their skill sets, we
30 talked about in the previous – in the previous discussion, that if you're looking at what skills and training might be, we know that for our services, we're bringing in families who are more likely – educators who are more likely dealing with – in an environment where overcrowding is an issue, and they need a space to study. There might not be a desk. There might not be
35 access to internet or a, you know, steady internet stream. There are so many things like finding a pen might be difficult. We've heard consistently over the years that where the opportunities (indistinct) the training will change in a way. And one of the examples given to us from Western Australia was that a service that has had people training for 10 years and not a single certificate or
40 a single test missed, not a single day missed, not a single certificate through there because the RTO has changed what they're delivering halfway through.

We also know that there have been challenges of what that looks like because of the cost of training people in regional and remote areas. An example at
45 Cape York is we're up to \$30,000 to train an educator, and again, there's massive childcare deserts in that region, and a massive need for families to A,

access to this parent support, but B, the opportunities for families to get in there and work, in particular women to get in there and work.

5 But where roads are cut off for six months of the year, they're not going to get teachers in the way we might envision anywhere else. Where houses have not been built, there's nowhere to house people, so again when we're talking about the need to train the local workforce and to build a workforce that's compatible with that particular environment, those things need to be accounted for. And that particular model in Cape York is, as I said, \$30,000
10 per person, but it got every single person through. And that particular childcare centre will be ready to function very, very shortly. But again, it took thinking outside of the box of what was actually there. It wasn't only things like the institutional environments, so you not only need the place to put it, but you need to think differently about how it might function, how you
15 might train, how you might access it, how you might support not only families, but the people working in the environment as well.

Again, when you look at the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and it talks about radical reform, it talks about closing that gap. We can't wait for
20 buildings to be built. We can't wait for roads to be developed. We can't wait for the qualifications for teachers to be employed. We have to be thinking flexibly and working alongside (indistinct) and seeing where to go. What does it look like? And again, why is it important? What I read back to you in my opening statement saying we've been doing this for more than 60,000
25 years, the idea of children accessing quality early education and care in a building is relatively new. And we can't wait 10 years for someone to get around to funding the dollars to put that institution into place. And again, it's an institution, it's not responding to the needs and the environment and the lived conditions of people in regional and remote areas - - -

30 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Sorry, could I just ask a question of you? Catherine, thank you very much. As I was reading your submission and I was just thinking about the section on workforce and ideas you have about supporting the workforce, my reading is that broadly you're supportive, but
35 you think we can go further in terms of specific recommendations about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - - -

MS LIDDLE: Absolutely.

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - supports.

MS LIDDLE: Absolutely. Yes. What is the support that each community needs, and again that will differ relating to what the community has already available to it? So I guess, do you think there's a space there? I think some
45 of the reforms introduced by the Federal government recently can go a way of getting there. The budget reforms. But there is still work to be done in ensuring it's accessible in the first place. So for example, some of those

reforms relate to being able to backfill, but there is no backfill in regional and remote communities. Again, if you're bringing someone in from a remote community and training them in town, how do you ensure that, as the primary carer, you've also brought in (indistinct) children that they might look after and there's housing and accommodation available for them, there's food available, there's child support available. So it's far more complex than just having the opportunity, it's do you even have the structures around that will make the opportunity accessible?

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We made some comments. They're much more specific. You're talking about a holistic perspective and that's fantastic. Some of our more specific ones were our observations and feedback was that not enough is done to recognise prior learning or ways of learning.

15 MS LIDDLE: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And so we've made some further comments about that, it particularly goes to qualification, which is recognising that many of these elders in particular, but the women who have ways of learning which are, in fact, exactly aligned but in a different language, different way.

MS LIDDLE: Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So we don't require a broader perspective around what are we actually wanting the qualification to do and to be. We, in fact, already have that, and I presume that you're quite comfortable with our perspective there and trying to recognise this.

30 MS LIDDLE: Absolutely. And certainly, strengthen the work on the National Agreement which looks at the sector strengthening plan and it has a dedicated stream, they're saying recognise this (indistinct) in community - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

35 MS LIDDLE: - - - and strengthen them. So it (indistinct).

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And the other one that we – again, it's a specific comment around – the holistic comment was around language.

40 MS LIDDLE: Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And we were quite aghast and seeing some examples in the Northern Territory of some of the training material which was English and there's - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Discovered thousands of - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It was difficult for us to even follow.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: It was gobbledygook, it wasn't even - - -

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Certainly, it wasn't tailored to the community
and the community needs, and in languages that the – well, a language that
the community actually could easily respond to, and therefore created an
unnecessary barrier. I'm presuming, again, seemingly that's a sort of a
10 specific example within your holistic view of programs need to be tailored to
the community needs and needs engagement with the community and
ultimately direction from the community - - -

MS LIDDLE: Absolutely.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Am I playing back to you - - -

MS LIDDLE: But you're saying that to me exactly what our communities
have said - - -

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: - - - that materials are indecipherable and irrelevant. So
certainly, it's something that we are very keen to see some movement on.

25 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Actually, just Closing The Gap and-design, et
cetera. I mean, in terms of quality framework, et cetera, are you seeing that
co-design process or is that something to be developed? Because if it goes to
all of, you know, (indistinct words).

30 MS LIDDLE: Yes. Look we certainly – in the Closing The Gap we have
seen significant movement from (indistinct) organisations and that includes
working alongside ACECQA and to see if we can't get a more responsive
system to make sure that what we're looking at is quality for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander children. And again, that relates to some of the earlier
35 conversations you were listening to. Those sorts of things should also
include how many hours. What is an optimum hour or hours for Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander children? As you know we always recommended
30 hours a week. But how that is delivered will be absolutely determined by
your communities and the communities working in co-design to say, 'Okay,
40 what does it look like for us? How do you measure it? And how do we get
the best out of it?' And certainly, what works up in (indistinct) will not work
in (indistinct) will not work here in, you know, Wurundjeri country.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It was good to see and it's good to hear the
reference to the 30 hours, and we saw your research, the research that was
commissioned for you as well around that issue. And I note that you say that
the 30 hours (indistinct) the activity test, but 30 hours is going to be an

acceptable interim statement. And I guess that in large, you've got a broader and longer-term ambition, but I guess that's - - -

5 MS LIDDLE: Yes. We're very vocal about that. But we certainly believe that the activity test is the biggest barrier to access, at this point in time. So we will strongly and continue to strongly advocate for its complete removal. However, we are also cognisant that it would take time to unravel that. So, again, relying slowly and back into that pathway. It would be lovely to see something that reflected a way of moving from the activity test. Again, when
10 we talk to our services, they do say it has been the biggest barrier. We've had examples again, in Western Australia of services that once operated at a hundred per cent capacity are now struggling to get 40 per cent. It's not because the places aren't there. It's because families can no longer access - - -

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's not because the families aren't there.

MS LIDDLE: It's not because the demand is not there. So they often, again, they will often offer placements in using their own subsidies, but that is unsustainable and unfair.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Catherine, are these in regional areas or in - - -

MS LIDDLE: Everywhere.

25 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Everywhere - - -

MS LIDDLE: It's not isolated to any one environment.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: There's very strong flavouring around the sustainable funding model and well, I think that's what we've reflected in our draft report. I'm putting it as a statement, I want you to tell us whether we have. But I was interested in maybe some of the examples where we currently serve. For instance, there are community childcare funded, and CCCF funded, they are supply side block funding of a nature. I'd be
35 interested in your thoughts on is that a useful model. Or is that not a codesigned community-led model and then it's kind of, yes, the funding's there but it doesn't get to the other ambitions in a broader sense. And we've also made recommendations at a broader level around the childcare subsidy, and it won't be relevant for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families but a hundred per cent rate subsidy. So effectively free for
40 families on less than \$80,000 a year. Now that's not all families, it won't be all Aboriginal families. But I'm just wondering - they're quite potentially different models to what you're suggesting if around a sustainable funding model, and I'm just interested in your thoughts around those things.

45 MS LIDDLE: All right. So sustainable funding, I think, in the first instance starts with getting rid of the complexity. So many different funding models

here available, all of them, and, again, even with those different funding models available, different States and Territories have nuances as well.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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MS LIDDLE: So it becomes an operational nightmare. We also know that there are a multiple – each community is going to identify different ways of operating. So they might need a completely different service model type. So as you know we're leaning very heavily to the concept of block funding. And that funding - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: - - - being able to be used and obviously needs some form of administration on it. But one, that is, A, easy for parents to access, B, easy for the service to administer, and C, enables the operating environment of that particular service to respond to its environment. Again, we see not only differences in whether or not people – how people are operating but some regions, may just say they need a playgroup, and that's all we need.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: So what we would be proposing is that any changes that related to that, basically would enable all of our service types to be functioning under a broader – a broader funding model. Did I answer that question?

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. But I suppose what I was trying to get at most is would the CCCF environment, as it is now, would that satisfy – is that a form of – because it's a form of block funding – but I'm not hearing you saying, 'We love the CCCF - - -'

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MS LIDDLE: Sorry. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and we want to see that continue and expand the (indistinct) - - -

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MS LIDDLE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - it's very limited.

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MS LIDDLE: It is.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And it doesn't – and I can imagine it hasn't been developed in the – along the lines of the - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: That is designed to.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - (indistinct) Closing The Gap. And therefore, it doesn't necessarily – it's kind of like a model imposed on a community rather than - - -

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MS LIDDLE: It is.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - developed for the community with the community. So I'm just – yes, that's really what it's all about.

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MS LIDDLE: So would we like everything – yes. so the answer is, we would – how to answer that one? It's yes and no. Yes. That is correct, your understanding - that our preference would be that people were not under the CCCF.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: Yes. And again, our feedback from our services has been that it's been restrictive, hard to operate under and hard for families to access as well.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: And again, a lot of those models, just say that before they were moved into the CCCF environment. They were far more successful and far more responsive and there was far more engagement - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: I was going to ask you about the, you know, what happened previously. But there were also – about the flexibility and, you know, and just how that worked in practice. But there was also the issue of the quantum of the funding, wasn't there, of that one? So could you just perhaps, talk about that for a bit? So what bits of that you'd like to see - - -

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MS LIDDLE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: - - - re-emerge or - - -

MS LIDDLE: Re-emerge. All right. So it does go back to the holistic service delivery. So under the CCCF, I suppose what it meant was those holistic services were dropped away. If you're not familiar with how Aboriginal community and child services work, often they are the only place where families can get a meal. Often they're the only place where families can ask for help if they're having trouble. So they work as early intervention but also prevention services.

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Again, they're the pieces that make it – but much like we have a workforce challenge, it's one thing to have the staff that the quality framework tells you

to have. It's another thing, particularly in regional and remote areas to have the people in that environment that are able to settle children, work with children and interpret with children. Again, those sorts of things dropped off when they were forced into a different funding model.

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So those things, again, if we are looking at a genuine reform it would be what does it look like as a bucket? How is it sustainable? How is it easy to access, not only for the service but also to families? Again, with the CCCF models and the subsidy schemes. What we hear is our services spend a significant amount of time with families just wading through the admin. That often they find it punitive and would force them into an environment where they feel like they're the bad guy. And a list of those concerns grows the deeper you work with families on what those particular barriers to access are.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: There's going to be a real challenge, I think, because we've had a bit of focus – quite a focus really, on making access simpler for families. And it is – so I'm speaking across the whole spectrum here, especially for families with incomes under \$80,000, where we hope that the health care card and may be able to be – be like an entry card. But sometimes moving to simplicity at one point for families can make it more complex at the back end for services to put everything together. I know that in your broader ambitions around funding, you talk about the current lack of funding for the backbone services that that's what – ECEC. So I guess I was definitely listening to what you're saying about making the funding simpler, thinking – yes. I think we've got some ideas about that - - -

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MS LIDDLE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - at the family and service end. It's going to be – I mean block fund model makes it potentially a lot simpler, but for the subsidies, there's still - - -

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MS LIDDLE: Absolutely. And certainly, that it does happen early this backbone model - - -

MS LIDDLE: - - - to the operation.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

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MS LIDDLE: And it's been really successful working with States and Territories, and each model is different in each jurisdiction, there's different challenges. But it spends a lot of its time looking at what technically would be really minor administrative things but if you don't know where to go, if you don't know who to speak to, you can't solve it. So sometimes some of the problems that are, what these early backbone intermediary can solve were insurmountable.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: M'mm.

5 MS LIDDLE: (Indistinct). It also looks at where the strengths of each of those services are, where the opportunities for growth might be and works with that community to bring in the structures that a service might need. I think as we move forward in that particular model, that will need additional resources to say, okay, if what was said is a fundamental reform to the funding landscape. If we are true to the Closing the Gap, the National agreement that says we're going to close the gap of early education, then we know that we're going to see more service delivery and we're going to see it in areas where there may not necessarily be mature ACCOs in place. So different approaches would be required.

15 And again, that's where your intermediary strengths need to come in to fight to say, 'Okay. This is the landscape. This is how we might operate. These are legal requirements. These are the quality requirements, how we get around those things and how we ensure that what we're given here is truly quality care and how we're ensuring that we're investing in the right way.'

20 So even, I think the landscape potentially could be really really different and really really interesting, but it will need the type of reform we're talking about in order for it to work.

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And that's back to Martin's original question about the additional supports that need to go around serious support and endorsements of the ACCOs.

30 MS LIDDLE: Serious support and endorsement of the ACCO model and central to that is really our early years services are pretty much the only service that recognises that our children don't sit in government departments, and that's what the early intermediary does. It solves the problem of this arm sits with health. That arm sits with disability. This arm sits with – this leg sits with education and so on, and so on.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I was going to take you to the National Quality Framework but perhaps, before we do that, I'm just interested in your perspective around the children that aren't of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, are you envisaging that the ACCOs would be providing services that was opened to all children? Or is it just for Aboriginal children or Torres Strait Islander children from specific backgrounds? I - - -

MS LIDDLE: Yes. So most Aboriginal services are open to everyone.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: There are, you know, we see – every now and then you hear of a service that is specific, but it doesn't – it's because it's designed to do something specific.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: So I think what's at the heart of the Aboriginal Community Control Services is their approach - - -

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: - - - and with the fact that all children should have access to that approach to learning.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: And that approach to development.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Okay. No. That's fine. But I think partly we're suggesting in the main with our recommendations which we rely on, which is an alternative way of thinking particularly for engaging with Aboriginal communities and then the Aboriginal community-led, developed programs funded. And we have another – we have the broader system, we need to quite settle on what does that look like. But - - -

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MS LIDDLE: Yes.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - at least if we stuck with our draft recommendations it looks like a level of subsidy that hopefully follows the child but is somewhat determined by the parent's income, it's agnostic as to the service or the centre in which they're going or to an extent. And I suppose there to come last, the thing about how that all gets married together. Because potentially there's – block funding will then – it would then – regardless, it wouldn't be from the childcare subsidy basis. So yes.

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40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And interestingly, I think, the ACCO model has a lot in common with the old community childcare model, developed here in Victoria and based around community need, community aspiration, not siloing education and the care between the original intent of community childcare movement and based on integration within the neighbourhood and, you know, it's possible that, you know, we start to think about why we've taken a bit out of your area but - - -

45 MS LIDDLE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - then we start to think about supply in unserved and under-served markets and we may well be thinking about

elements of community engagement and co-design. So I think that you've set out a very interesting set of principles that are for your communities, but from which I think we can learn wider lessons from reading it.

5 MS LIDDLE: We agree with that.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I was going to take you then – if you're happy – around the National Quality Framework. And I was just wondering if you wanted to expand a little bit more on what you think is needed in terms of
10 change and what specifically is required to adequately recognise and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and what we need to take on board as part of our thinking.

MS LIDDLE: I think the biggest point is it doesn't really have the capacity to
15 reflect the (indistinct) of Aboriginal culture (indistinct) or our ways of knowing, (indistinct). It doesn't support the quality requirements of our ACCO ECEC services. Particularly ones funded by the CCCF-R. And that's because they're deemed marginally (indistinct words) particularly out of scope of the NQF. So it means that we've got no nationally consistent, we've
20 got no nationally consistent regulatory standards for those services. It also means that you need to look at how that is developed in partnership. So when we're talking about well what does it mean, (indistinct) national approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, being true to the National agreement, and that means it's something that's developed in
25 partnership.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: M'mm.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.
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MS LIDDLE: And again, that's completely changing the way that the government is used to working, and statutory bodies are used to working with Aboriginal people because you've got to be transparent and you've got to feel comfortable with being challenged about and understanding, 'Actually, that's
35 not what we consider a really good outcome for an Aboriginal child.' So we think consideration needs to be given to developing the unique framework and the standards that are particular to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ECEC sector and accessing ECEC services.

40 I think also when we're talking about how we reflect significance of culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, there is currently no need for the NQF to do that. So it means that technically if you're looking at the NQF and you've children in a mainstream service, they're hitting all the boxes, but what we're saying is that in actual fact, and I
45 go back to the opening statement, if they haven't had access to a service that roots you into who you are before you hit the school system, before you're told you're other, before you're told that you have to verify that you're an

Aboriginal person, that you're actually too white to be Aboriginal or you don't speak your language. They're the things that are really needed to ensure our children are culturally strong enough to enter and thrive in the school environment. And, again, the NQF doesn't acknowledge how fundamental wrap-around services are, and wrap-around supports are to creating an environment that our children, but not only our children, our families and communities are thriving. So they're three – the three things.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: If you go back one of the places – like do we need to go back to the codesign of the actual framework itself in a collaborative manner, and then move forward whether an almost separate component or an integrated – is it a separate sort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Quality Framework? Or is it an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expectations and needs embedded into the National Quality Framework as a whole?

MS LIDDLE: Well, both. There's probably a little bit of both.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

MS LIDDLE: And the reason we say that is if there isn't a targeted approach often what happens is that when it's embedded in the overarching approaches it disappears, and it's just the nature of the beast.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: So when you can see yourself reflected in the overarching framework, that is a wonderful thing. When you have a set of actions or plans that are deliberately stepping out how you achieve what's in the overarching then that becomes a whole different playing field.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, it's entirely consistent with what we've (indistinct words), as you would appreciate. But I don't think it's something we have actually – we did ask questions in our draft report - - -

MS LIDDLE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - ECEC. But I think you're articulating an ambition which we need to take up because – well, it's very hard for us as an organisation to recommend Closing The Gap changes and reforms and not actually limit ourselves, that is inappropriate, but also in this area to not adequately address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (indistinct).

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Same thing goes for our proposal, there needs to be submissions and you raised the point that appropriately incorporates - - -

MS LIDDLE: Yes. And look, we are broadly supportive of it. We think that there is a need for it, but it is one of those things that if it's stood up, how to ensure it does embed Closing The Gap priority reforms. And how do we ensure that it has what it needs to get the outcomes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It needs a review, Catherine.

MS LIDDLE: I think as usual, my friends say it goes back to working with the Aboriginal community as it's developed to ensure that its stewardship, its ambitions, its goals and the way it operates align with all of those priority reforms. Because the National Agreement defines an incredible road map, and those road maps can be reflected in anything that's developed in any model, which - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Because we're being asked, 'Well, what do you mean by a Commission? Give us more details, what does it look like? What is its governance structure? Who's on it? What, you know, roles and all those sorts of things.' Not speaking out of turn, but reflecting feedback from Romlie who's asked us and, you know, our own internal commission meaning is, well, what role will Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative bodies have in this Commission? And that was an appropriate calling - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Data collection and - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: House, health and care - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: Absolutely. And it starts with shared - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And you're the Chair of SNAICC so - - -

MS LIDDLE: CEO - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sorry. I beg your pardon. So what role would SNAICC wish to have if it could be done - - -

MS LIDDLE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Or is that inappropriate or is there a broader cohort or others that - - -

MS LIDDLE: A shared position I think is usually broader than just SNAICC.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

5

MS LIDDLE: So even SNAICC whilst it's involved in shared decision-making, we're bringing in expert leaders and community representatives. So it is potentially that type of model. Where you're leaning into an organisation like SNAICC it would be help. It would be to bring in the expertise to get that leadership group together and to help the secretariat functions on how the group is involved with shaping the codesign, ensuring that their views are reflected. And not only reflected, actually work in the way that they were intended. Because we often see the best intentions for policies and – but (indistinct words) the ability to (indistinct) and that's where your shared decision groups come into play. Because they can test those things that can read back and feedback as to how it's working, where the (indistinct) are, and it becomes an ongoing reactive thing. It's not a, yes. it's done now and walk away. It's continually engaging with those groups.

20 You'd be thinking, of course, though that it doesn't take away the control of the Aboriginal community sector as well. So there would still be a need for us to have a level of self-determination in how our services operate and how they're designed. But it would play a critical role in resolving the issues relating to gaps in the service delivery and gaps in accountability, those types of things.

25

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And potentially a strong connection with the new Commissioner, one would think - - -

30 MS LIDDLE: Yes - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - that – the inter-relationship between the ECEC and the broader concepts of ECEC that you're bringing to us, that children's safety and the role of the Commissioner would be really really vital connections to build.

35

MS LIDDLE: Yes. Absolutely. Because the Commissioner (indistinct words) is an accountability mechanism to all of the policies and all of the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. So one can imagine that position really did need to be – and, again, I'd imagine the commission would come up with their own understanding of how that engagement worked and where responsibilities sat. But as we say and as we know, our families that can access the ECEC in a timely manner and in an appropriate manner are far less likely to need any tertiary interventions or outcomes.

40
45

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Absolutely.

5 MS LIDDLE: We know they get better outcomes so they will absolutely
have a say in that. I think the other role the commission can play is what we
– in an ideal world, every Aboriginal child can have access to Aboriginal-led
and controlled service delivery options. In the short term that's not viable,
10 there are still mainstream services delivering early education and care to a
significant number of that population. So the commission could potentially
say, 'Well we're working with entities like SNAICC to go, well, what does it
look like in your environment? Or how do we now flip that so that rather
15 than those services partnering with our services, it's the other way around, our
services partner with mainstream ECEC services to embed what appropriate
ECEC looks like for our children?' So there are (indistinct words).

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. We had a recommendation talking about
cultural capacity and capability and Rom challenged us to think that that's the
wrong way to think about it. It's more around delivery and ensuring
culturally safe early childhood education experiences across the board and
you're now articulating that an additional potential solution there, which is
around partnering to - - -

20 MS LIDDLE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - focus in on that aspect in – on ACCO-
delivered or mainstream.

25 MS LIDDLE: Absolutely and - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: The definition of - - -

30 MS LIDDLE: Well, we're talking about what the current opportunities are
that are already in place because a lot of groundwork has been laid.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: M'mm.

35 MS LIDDLE: Sarah's quite right in reminding me, that we do have the
ECEC policy and partnership - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

40 MS LIDDLE: - - - to make sure that brings together - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

45 MS LIDDLE: - - - not only the education providers from every State and
Territory but also child intervention departments in every State and Territory.
And also in actual fact that could be an incredible tool to use in helping to
design and ensure partnership.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, as you have been talking, the thing that's going around in my head, you talk about wrap-around services. My understanding of what you mean by that is, it is extending into those other silos, so whether it should be other services or health services or playgroups, et cetera, of which early childhood education and care is another but perhaps, significant and maybe the sinker service for all children because not every child is going to be (indistinct) or be part of those others sort of (indistinct) universal link, in that broader sense.

10

MS LIDDLE: M'mm.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But a funding source that is specific, block, and controlled through an Aboriginal controlled organisation requires then the cooperation across those silos. You know, we could say it in ECEC, but it doesn't have the States and it doesn't have the other components in and it will be that – its functionality and its achieving the goals.

20 MS LIDDLE: Yes. And one of the really – and an example of that, you know, one of the, I guess, pilots that are functioning at this moment in time, and 'pilots' is intense wording in our sector. Because often when there are breakthroughs they're pilots. And those pilots are determined again, by governments and their ambitions at that point in time. And one of the reasons we sort of lean into things like the National Partnership Agreement is because they extend past political silos. So that we get a sustainability of funding and sustainability in outcome. But anyhow, that particular example in (indistinct) has enabled that community to develop individualised learning plans on a scale unseen before for every single child. And that includes nutrition, that includes what do parents need? That includes having paediatricians on site. That is it is quite remarkable and it's been the dream of that particular community for more than a decade, nearly two decades, in order to be able to stand it up in that way.

35 So there are incredible and emerging examples of what it might look like if we have a different way of funding these services. And a different way of understanding if you were putting your emphasis into children first and the families first, you get a much different outcome on Closing The Gap targets.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I've just noticed we've extended reasonably, hence the (indistinct words) had originally intended. We didn't want to take up more of your time than necessary. Do you have more time to talk? Is there – there are something that I wanted to ask but if not, we can - - -

45 MS LIDDLE: We can (indistinct words).

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: You're good?

MS LIDDLE: No. I'm good. I'm good.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sorry, I'm distracted. You mentioned something there which was fairly important, I'll come back to it, if my colleagues – sorry. I have remembered it now and it's going back to some of your material and the example you gave which is around pilots and it's somewhat triggering. And another word or concept that seemed to not meet with a lot of enthusiasm was 'grants'.

10 MS LIDDLE: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And we're talking about supply-side funding, block funding, but grants? No. And even though they might have the same characteristics – and I just wanted to understand, does it matter what we call it or is it more the characteristics or is there something about, which is respectful of having something to both seem to be aligned to the principles of Closing the Gap, novel in its approach, because whatever we have done before either hasn't worked, or at least if you're going back to the future, and going back to something that worked a period of time ago, five, 10, 15, 20
20 years ago, whatever that happens to be. It feels like whatever we're proposing now is novel, but I'll stand corrected. But certainly, grants result in (indistinct), I suppose I wanted to understand a bit more.

25 MS LIDDLE: Well, I think by nature grants sound temporary.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

MS LIDDLE: And I - - -

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And I presume that was what it's - - -

35 MS LIDDLE: Yes. They sound temporary and history will show often they are. And often the parameters change, often there are different regulatory requirements relating to those grants. So as soon a service might have multiple grants that they're trying to administer at any one time, and again that becomes (indistinct). But it's not very sustainable in terms of projecting how are we going to fund your organisation? How are you going to staff your organisation? How you're going to commit to service delivery that your community needs? But it also means that you spend a significant amount of
40 time trying to fit any (indistinct words) in the first place. So the burdens are significant.

45 When it comes to what exists the word is (indistinct), you quite rightly picked out it is also the characteristics. So any funding model needs to have characteristics that are thinking outside of government funding cycles and government relation cycles. As we've touched on those cycles often mean that your best-laid plans and even your best outcomes aren't necessarily

recognised in the next spate of reforms or conditions by an incoming government and that could be at the jurisdictional level, it could be at the Commonwealth level. So those things are a constant battle.

5 Certainly, we're across anything to do with the National Agreement – peaks and communities are saying, well, anything that looks at our regions needs to be looking at 10-year agreements, 10-year funding cycles in order to be able to get that and not mini-cycles (indistinct) but ones that are reflective of and reactive to changes in the environment and (indistinct words) or having to
10 ensure again the outcomes that everyone is hoping to get in the first place.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, it's a useful perspective to hear. Because at some point, even if it's codesigned you still need to define it. So taking, you know, hearing, well, it needs to have longevity, the grant might have a
15 one year or a three year, but 10 years, well, maybe that's long enough, and so there's something around wanting to specifically – I just wanted – wondered what was at play there, and I think clearly we're hearing is the uncertainty, I suppose, that it was, as opposed to the commitment that is being sought - - -

20 MS LIDDLE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - around it.

MS LIDDLE: And if I could circle back a bit too on something that you as
25 Commissioner relate to even how we interpret – how we collect data and how we interpret that data. That, again, is massive because the data sets relating to how we evaluate success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children weren't designed by us and they don't fit what we consider to be the best outcomes for our children. Also, when you're looking at data sets, if they're
30 not owned by the Aboriginal community the translation of them can be misinterpreted.

So often an Aboriginal, you know, even just an Aboriginal person walking down the street could read a dataset sometimes. It can be that obvious and
35 go, 'I can tell you why that happened but it's not what you think you can see.' When you bring in the specialists is what you can see when you do that data translation. There's a whole – it opens up a whole new gamut.

So, again, they're – they are the things that again when you're talking about what the grants look like or the funding models might look like, enabling
40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to say, 'Well, these are the outcomes that you get. This is how you get them, and this is how we know things are working or (indistinct words).'

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. In fact, it's – it doesn't just end at the early childhood education care, the data and data sovereignty it extends through the development of those data sets and what are we measuring? We

often hear around the sort of development vulnerabilities as measured at the point of which children enter into primary school as a, you know, a census I suppose of all children and then that comes back or extended back into, well, what was happening in the five years of their life beforehand before they attend preschool or they attend ECEC, what was the environment in which they were in.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But also, with the strength-based measures that we could capture as well as other deficits - - -

MS LIDDLE: Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: - - - that goes with that. That message, I think, has come through as really loud and clear in the commission's discussions with our Closing The Gap team on this - - -

15
COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I know that my point is the (indistinct) well, extends beyond that.

20
COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And if need be, there'll be another one of those things we'll have to make a recommendation or a review around the interlink element, the continuum of the (indistinct).

25
MS LIDDLE: Yes. Absolutely and when you think about the National Agreement and the new targets that were set that ambition was set on saying we're looking at the wrong spot, we actually need to be looking at (indistinct words) domains with the ability to then start influencing what those domains were. Put time through the shared decision-making bringing in more strength-based approaches and ambitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. So, yes, we need a standard that can measure where there are gaps, but you also need those measurements towards (indistinct) to show where those strengths are.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: My final point is and you might have other things, Catherine, to reflect on. But it's more an observation (indistinct) you to correct me, which is when we look at the data, the statistics around the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children relative to the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, and there is a very large number of children coming through. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I haven't – like I look at them and say that's a call to arms, as in, you know, if there's a cohort of children that are missing out, but that cohort is very large relative to the other cohorts. Well, it's even more of a necessity to do something in this space.

40
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I haven't seen that sort of narrative coming through in your material, and maybe I'm missing it. I just wondered like when I look at them I was quite taken aback at the – I just thought the number of children would be in proportion to the numbers. But it's not that, is it? It's a significantly larger –
5 dramatically larger number and that's fantastic, but what are we actually doing then to cater for this cohort?

MS LIDDLE: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Because I expect most people are prejudging early childhood education and care on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the community but, in fact, it is disproportionately larger, not in a bad way, but it is a much larger number.

15 MS LIDDLE: You're right. It isn't reflected strongly in our submission. Where it sits is in the sector is outside of that, so in those intersecting pieces that we're working on the policy reforms. So the sector strengthening plan identifies the need for growth of the services to be able to respond to the number of children and the needs of those environments because in the
20 current landscape and the cost of living has had an unfairer impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. And we know that those things can be seen for years. So a lot of that work you will see reflected in places like the sector strengthening plan, but also in the intermediary work that we do through SNAICC. So that one is projecting
25 where are the biggest growth areas? Where are the biggest gaps in the ability to get education and care into those early cohorts and what will the numbers of the workforce potentially need to be in order to respond to it?

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MS LIDDLE: And how are we going to train those people and what are the skill sets that need to be recognised? What can be transferrable and translatable? So you're right there is a massive piece of work that needs to be done. It largely sits in the intermediary space.

35 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Because it's not just about what's the potential future demand for ACCOs.

MS LIDDLE: Exactly.

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And the standard transformation of other services as well.

MS LIDDLE: Correct.

45

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: That was it from me and my colleagues. I don't know if there was anything else, Catherine, that has been raised or that we haven't touched on.

5 MS LIDDLE: No. I'm getting the nod.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We have taken far more of your time than we expected. But thank you very much. And looking forward to future conversations but thank you very much for coming in today.

10

MS LIDDLE: Thank you. Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I might then just cause a call for a pause then for our – be ready until 1.15. And so in about 45 minutes or thereabouts, we'll recommence. So thank you very much. We'll see you shortly.

15

MS LIDDLE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thanks.

20

SHORT ADJOURNMENT

[12.34 PM]

25

RESUMED

[1.16 PM]

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you and welcome back. We will reconvene our public hearings now, and very shortly I'll hand over to Julie Price, thank you very much for joining us. But for your benefit – and I know we've already spoken, but my name is Martin Stokie, I'm one of the presiding commissioners for this inquiry into early childhood education and care, joined by Deborah Brennan on my right and Lisa Gropp on my left, and we make up the three commissioners.

35

This is a public hearing and so there may well be people online. We can't necessarily see who they are because that's the technology, but they could be joining us. There may also be in the hearing and others, so I'm letting you know. We're also – it's kind of a little bit informal in the structure, but there's a formal transcript being taken of today and that will be made available as has been the case and will be the case for all of our public hearings.

40

I'm going to throw to you now, but perhaps, for the record and just for the transcript if you could introduce yourselves and your organisation, and then if you had an opening statement or something that you particularly wanted to raise then by all means, the floor is yours. We're very much here to listen, and we might take it from there.

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5 But perhaps, also before I do can I just thank you for the contributions that
you've made across a number of conversations that we've had today, and the
submission and the time and effort that you've taken to respond not only to
our draft report, but to earlier works as well. Our work is reflective of the
information and the insights that we're getting, and so it's better for the
challenge and the ideas from everybody, so thank you for that. And with that
sort of note of gratitude, I'll hand over to yourselves and introduce
yourselves, and by all means, make any statement that you wish to.

10

MS PRICE: Thanks very much, Martin. Good afternoon, it's so lovely to see
you all again.

15

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed.

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MS PRICE: I am Julie Price, I'm the executive director of Community Child
Care Association, and I'm joined today by Linda Davison, our chairperson at
Community Child Care Association, and Linda is also the coordinator of
Clarendon Children's Centre. We're pleased to have the opportunity to share
CCC's view as part of this significant process.

25

Community Child Care Association is the peak body for community-owned
education and care services supporting long daycare, after-school hours care,
kindergartens, family daycare, occasional care, educators, teachers, leaders,
coordinators, and directors. And CCC's vision and purpose are underpinned -
- -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Excuse me, sorry.

35

MS PRICE: - - - by the belief that all children have a right to access high-
quality education and care regardless of their circumstances. CCC is also the
lead agency in the delivery of the Victorian Inclusion Agency in partnership
with Yooralla and KU. We deliver mentoring and coaching support to CCS-
eligible services across Victoria to help them develop their inclusion plans, to
access funding, to establish inclusive environments, and generally address
barriers to inclusion.

40

In 2023 we had 8658 requests for inclusion support over that 12 months. So
that's been ongoing growth in demand for that service. As I know you are
aware, we're also acting as an employer bargaining representative in the
negotiations of the first-ever national multi-employer bargaining process in
which we're seeking a government-funded 25 per cent wage increase for
educators and teachers in the long daycare sector.

45

We're pleased that the Productivity Commission's draft report on early
education and care reflects a very similar vision to Community Child Care to
deliver a universal education and care sector, recognising that when we place

the needs of children first, the full benefits to families, the economy, and society will flow.

5 As you mentioned, we've made an extensive written submission in response to the draft report, and I'm happy to pause there. But we also have – Linda and I could focus on a few of the matters that we have made in our submission, including the value of community-managed services, inclusion, outside-school-hours care, supply-side funding, and workforce. We're happy to talk to those or - - -

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Sounds like a good list.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. just looking at (indistinct) if Linda wants to - - -

15

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Actually, could you say the list again?

MS PRICE: Yes. sure. So the value of community-managed services, inclusion, outside-school-hours care, supply-side funding, and workforce.

20

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you.

MS PRICE: So I'll hand over to Linda to speak to you about the value of community managed services as Linda has led such a service for over 25 30 years, including leading that service to an Excellent rating three times, which only a very small number of services across Australia have succeeded.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed. Congratulations.

30

MS DAVISON: Thank you.

MS PRICE: She is very well-placed to speak to this topic.

MS DAVISON: Yes. In fact, I'm really happy to speak to this topic because 35 it's almost literally my life's work, you know. I've been at Clarendon Children's Centre for 36 years, and we opened at that time when that model of community funding was there. So we opened with capital funding from the federal government. I started six weeks before the centre opened and have been there, you know, through the 80s and into the 90s when that model 40 of capital funding to get services started. And then operational funding to meet kind of 75 per cent of wages, you know, that was a model, and it was a model I would say that worked.

45 And I think we know that there's all kinds of research that tells us that community-owned services provide best return for government funding, that the not-for-profit community-owned sector provides really high-quality services. Our service is an example, but there are many examples where

frequently it's not-for-profit services that are at the forefront of providing, you know, really inclusive services, and that are providing services in areas where it's not necessarily provided a great return financially. So it's not necessarily attractive to the for-profit sector, but those communities need
5 really good, high-quality early childhood education and care just as much as any other community. And I think the community-managed model is a great example of how services can really be embedded in their communities and reflect the needs of the communities and respond to those needs.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So can I just ask, in the way you're laying out your opening comments you're referring to community-managed rather than the more general term not-for-profit, is that right?

MS DAVISON: Yes. because I think that's a really key thing. It's not just
15 not-for-profit, although clearly, that's part of our model, but it is that community-managed sector. So at our service, we have a committee of management, they're made up of seven parents whose children attend the service. And our whole model of governance is about consulting with families, engaging with families, and providing a service that reflects the
20 needs of those families and their children. So - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Just while you're finding your space - - -

MS DAVISON: Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Just for the record, could you just introduce – you might have done it and I missed it, but could you just introduce yourself and the organisation?

30 MS DAVISON: Sure.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I might have missed it, and I'm sorry if I'm asking you to repeat yourself.

35 MS DAVISON: That's okay. I think Julie did that for me, but my name is Linda Davison and I'm coordinator at Clarendon Children's Centre which is a small 40-place, not-for-profit, community-owned centre in South Melbourne. So, very new here.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sorry, if I've asked (indistinct).

MS DAVISON: No. Not at all. And I think – so to go from that time when we opened in the late 1980s to now, what we've seen is that funding changes over those decades have really seen that not-for-profit community-owned
45 part of the sector shrink, and instead be overtaken by a more for-profit model. And so now we have almost 70 per cent of the long daycare sector is taken up by the for-profit sector. And, you know, we need balance, but I don't think

that's what we've got at the moment. And that lopsided growth of for-profit as opposed to community-managed not-for-profit services really means that families have less choice and that there's a reduced investment in quality.

5 I think there is a tension for for-profit services in meeting the needs and their
statutory obligations to shareholders and to owners, and having the needs of
children and best outcomes for children as a paramount, which I think we
don't have that tension in the community-managed sector. And I think there
10 is an argument about efficiency of government funding and how that applies
in a not-for-profit community-owned centre.

As I said, the unique aspect of community-managed services is that they're
run by communities for communities at their best, that's when it works best.
And because that's the model, we're best placed to respond quite actively and
15 quite quickly to changes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: I don't think you were here in the last
session, were you?

20 MS DAVISON: No.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But we had a very useful discussion with
SNAICC, and it's interesting to hear your discussion about the community-
managed model because it's a real parallel with the Aboriginal Community
25 Controlled model.

MS DAVISON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And I was commenting that the
30 community-controlled childcare began here in Victoria. And it was really
interesting to hear the way they laid out their ambitions for connecting with
families, responding to need, trying to overcome funding silos and so on, and
it certainly reminded me of the history of community-based childcare.

35 MS DAVISON: Yes. Absolutely. And I think when families feel that a
service reflects them, reflects their needs, their culture, their priorities, they're
more inclined to use those services and be active in those services and
participate. I mean, I think that's a really key part of how we operate is that
40 it's not just families coming to drop their kids off and then pick them up, at
the end of the day, there's a real sense of community. And, you know, in this
day and age when lots of families have – their own extended family may not
be close by, you know, often a centre like ours will provide that kind of
village that we need to raise children.

45 I think the other thing is that research would tell us that the community-
managed services are often the most inclusive services in terms of caring for
high numbers of children with additional needs and from diverse

backgrounds. And frequently that would be at a cost that's incurred by the service itself and is passed on to families because the current funding that supports inclusion is inadequate frankly.

5 So really we think that in terms of your final report – and not that I'm trying to tell you what to do but - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: (Indistinct words.)

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct words.)

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Give it your best shot.

15 MS DAVISON: We do think that there needs to be an expansion of capital funding to establish new services, particularly in those areas that have been described as childcare deserts. That there's a reforming of the Community Child Care Fund to deliver appropriate, long-term operational funding to support delivery of services, particularly in those under-served and unserved markets. And that there's a development of some business support programs
20 that will help re-balance the balance of for-profit and not-for-profit services in Australia. So, over to you on inclusion.

MS PRICE: I was going to speak to inclusion unless you have some questions.

25

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I did have a question. And we may have talked about this already, but we've heard it from others which is that particularly with the parent governance structure, the nature of parents' involvement is relatively time-constrained. So it's usually the time in which
30 their child or children are attending the service. And it sort of strikes me and has been raised, which is does that inhibit the community sector from being able to take a longer-term view? Perfectly fine and catering in the moment, but if you had to think of a 10, 20-year time horizon which is what you've done – but I daresay probably for all – and you would remember all the
35 parents that have been on all of your committee, whether they might say – but do they genuinely have a long-term time horizon? And I just wonder is that one of the inhibitors which is the almost inherent – it's the blessing and the curse almost, I wonder, of the structure, if the governance - - -

40 MS DAVISON: Yes. I mean, I think that's a valid point. I think that's probably more so in Victoria, we have a sessional kindergarten model which also has a committee of parents management, and in that model, the teacher is teaching on the floor, reports to the committee. And there's probably a lot more responsibility on committee in those services because their teacher's
45 role is as a teacher. Whereas in a long daycare service like this, my role is to manage the service. My role is to liaise with committee and with families. And also in the preschool sector, you're probably talking about just a two-

year so it's – and often committees will turn over yearly. In our model it's not uncommon – we've certainly had several committee members who've - - -

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Multiple children.

MS DAVISON: - - - been there for multiple children, seven, eight years at times. I think the key thing is to have someone in my role if you like - - -

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed.

MS DAVISON: - - - who is able to both deal with day-to-day stuff and with (indistinct).

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Like you then?

MS DAVISON: Yes.

MS PRICE: Yes. We need to do that very much, Martin.

20 MS DAVISON: Well, I mean, I think in a way it's also reflective of the broader workforce problem. Because one of the things that we're seeing is that, you know, I trained as a kindergarten teacher, worked in kindergarten, went overseas, ran a nursery school, came back, did this job, that's it. That's what I've done. But these days, you know, people are often being elevated to
25 positions of leadership and management before they've really had a lot of experience working with children. They may have very little training in management and so of course they're learning on the job. And it's high stress, high responsibility, generally not very well paid. So, you know, it's
30 hard to get that longevity of experience and expertise in that kind of environment.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So what qualification does a person need to take that leadership role?

35 MS DAVISON: I think there are services out there whose coordinator or director might only have a Diploma in Early Childhood.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So they could be what?

40 MS DAVISON: So they might be an educator, not - - -

MS PRICE: Yes. So there's no actual qualification required as a director, coordinator of a service.

45 MS DAVISON: I mean, there's training that you can do, but it's not a requirement. And quite often it's kind of needs must, you know, 'We're desperate. We don't have a coordinator. You, you know, you've been here

the longest. You know, you're it.' And so the organisation – so we used to have the Coordinators Association and I – that, you know, used to meet yearly to support coordinators in (indistinct) services. And over the years what we discovered was that numbers were dwindling, and that's because
5 those coordinators didn't have confidence to leave their services even for a morning because it was, you know, just felt too risky.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Too time-constrained.

10 MS DAVISON: Yes. Too time-constrained, too uncertain about what might happen.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No. It's interesting because yesterday we heard when we had a group of academics from Monash and one of the things
15 they were talking to us about was the role of the educational leader and the responsibilities on the educational leader and their perception that that's not matched by any appropriate requirements around training or preparation. So I'm interested in that position.

20 MS PRICE: And it's very similar, I think, Deb, to what Linda was saying was you look around and it's you. In many services it's a brand-new teacher, they're the only teacher so therefore, 'It must be you to be the educational leader.' They haven't really worked out their own pedagogy and how they work with children, let alone helping the rest of the educators in the service.
25 So both of those really key leadership roles within services don't have required educational qualifications.

MS DAVISON: And sometimes if it's not the teacher, it's the coordinator.

30 MS PRICE: Yes.

MS DAVISON: So they're just adding an extra pile. So at my service which is a little service, 40 children a day, we have three educational leaders currently because really that's what it needs to actually do that job well and
35 properly and spend time mentoring educators, the educator team, and have a direction for the pedagogy of the service.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Can I ask you, Linda, because the theme of leadership has just really stuck with me from yesterday. Now at the moment, we're talking about the leadership within a service, but do you or other
40 services that you're aware of take a leadership role more widely in the sector?

MS DAVISON: Yes. So I'd say leadership is a really big part of what we do both internally – so we have a system of leadership portfolios that all
45 educators can put their hand up for. So it could be our newest, youngest, least-qualified person who has a passion for sustainability or wellbeing or

cultural inclusion, and they can pick it up. That's an annual thing and it's supported by additional pay and time off the floor and so forth.

5 So, currently, we have an arts leader, and last year she presented at the ECA conference about our arts-in-residence project. And our cook who is also our food education leader, a really skilled, amazing woman, and she's presented at both ELAA and ECA in the past and has worked really close with the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program to help them develop their Early-years program because previously it was all about school age. So, yes,
10 we do a lot of our – you know, and we're often contacted by other services to – 'Can we come and visit? Can we talk to you about how you apply for Excellent?'

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: I think I might have asked you this last time, so apologies. But is part of the reason you're able to do this because you don't have a high rent? Is that - - -

20 MS DAVISON: We don't have a high rent, but we do pay levies to our local council. And the levies probably aren't market rent, but they're well over \$100,000 a year. So it's not nothing.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No.

25 MS DAVISON: So we pay – No. We pay, no, we pay.

MS PRICE: (Indistinct) yes.

30 MS DAVISON: And our fees are, in our area, moderate. There are certainly plenty of services with higher fees. We're not the cheapest. Like I say, we're the best.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: The inclusion support.

35 MS PRICE: Inclusion support.

MS DAVISON: Sorry, Julie.

40 MS PRICE: No. All good. As I know you're aware, a truly universal education and care sector is dependent on ensuring every child feels welcome and has a strong sense of belonging and is able to fully participate in the service of their parent's choice. As Linda's been saying, the community sector has led the way on inclusion, providing services in low socioeconomic areas as well as covering the funding gap to ensure that children are able to access the support they need for the full amount of time they are in the
45 service.

And we all know that right now there are many children missing out on that opportunity, and that is exacerbated by the fact that the current funding is insufficient, as Linda was saying, to cover the true costs of providing Inclusion Support.

5

So as an Inclusion Agency, we've had a contract for eight and a half years now that's been extended and extended. The original amount that we tendered for eight and a half years ago is now the base level of funding which, you know, given how much costs have increased - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So it still hasn't – didn't increase over the years at all?

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MS PRICE: No. Not consistently. So we've had, you know, we got additional income investment of funds through – through and after COVID.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

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MS PRICE: We have got some additional funds for this financial year and the next financial year. The way it was divided up was each Inclusion Agency in each State and Territory got an extra million dollars for each year, but that meant Tasmania, whose annual budget - - -

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MS DAVISON: Like the Senate.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, I'll just.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: (Indistinct.)

30

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct.) Senate.

MS PRICE: So, you know, that additional million a year, which sounds like a lot – but our original budget was nine million a year.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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MS PRICE: So, you know, that doesn't even cover the costs of our ongoing need, let alone trying to match that growing need that has evolved from a growth in the number of services, the growth in need post-COVID as far as the complexity of issues that children of families are presenting with, the in-services. And so it's this constant battle, we find, as the Inclusion Agency to meet that ever-growing demand in a way that helps to build the capacity of the sector.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You mentioned that you had 8000 applications last year - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: 658 I think I - - -

MS PRICE: 8600. Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Six hundred and - - -

MS PRICE: 8000.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: 658? There you go.

10 MS PRICE: Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: How many did you approve? How many - - -

15 MS PRICE: Well that's not applications. So that's people ringing and saying we need support.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So I get that.

20 MS PRICE: We responded to all of those.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So you were able to give Inclusion Support to every single one of those?

25 MS PRICE: Not to the extent that they can. This is a problem. We're able to respond and provide some advice, provide some support.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But not the financial support?

30 MS PRICE: We don't give out the financial support. So that comes from the Inclusion Development fund manager. We help them apply for their funding.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Right.

35 MS PRICE: One of the issues in the Inclusion Agency is that we try to help them to see whether it is an additional educator, additional funding they need or is it just strategies that they need - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. So just to help – right. To triage, I

40 suppose.

MS PRICE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Or just the request and - - -

45 MS PRICE: That's right. So we're helping them - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - what they think they need.

MS PRICE: - - - plan, yes, what it is they need in response to what they have
- - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So we've made some recommendations in our
– or observations in our draft report around Inclusion Support.

MS PRICE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We don't believe it's adequate.

MS PRICE: No.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We have heard, and we're pretty consistent or
at least agreed with the criticisms or concerns, which is that it's very narrowly
defined as to what people can access and how they can access it.

MS PRICE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You're living and breathing this. What more
would you tell us if we could restructure, reform, rewrite the Inclusion
Support then?

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MS PRICE: Yes. So I agree that the definition for an additional educator,
although it's been broadened over the last few years, it's still very narrow and
that the fee that services are paid is not nearly enough. It should – because if
you're getting an additional educator in for a child that needs to be included
because they have additional needs, you're needing a person with additional
skills, not a Certificate 3 or a non-qualified person. So we believe the
additional educator funding should be at the – at least at the diploma level,
pitched at the diploma level.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

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MS PRICE: We also think that in the short term, the Inclusion Agency
should be funded more so that they're going in there able to work much more.
Because we've had this massive turnover in the workforce the people who are
working with children aren't as skilled and knowledgeable as they have been
in the past. So they're needing more coaching and mentoring than they have
and they're working with children with more complex needs, and so more
funding to be able to do that.

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But we also think in the longer term we should be looking much more
holistically at inclusion, and is inclusion part of the supply side funding that
all services, depending on the needs of their community, get additional
funding and then the inclusion program is on top of that. But I think we need

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to look more closely at that and how it could work, how those two could work together, because I don't think we've got a model in Australia at the moment that's working very well together as far as inclusion of all children into all services.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. But the partnering and the mentoring is an interesting idea, and particularly given the fairly significant turnover of staff, and that's really important. The broader foundational – and that's a challenge or a term used perhaps, more in disability, foundational support, and what the original intent of Inclusion Support is actually broader than just those with disabilities.

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MS PRICE: That's right. But most of that additional funding is targeted to children mainly with disabilities though.

15

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed. And I presume that's because of the limit of how much is there - - -

MS PRICE: Funding.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and perhaps, the very acute need of those children other than as a priority over other needs - - -

MS PRICE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Did you have a sense of quantum? Have you – you're looking and living and breathing this, like is there a rule of thumb for you about well needs to increase by 10 per cent, or it needs to double or it needs to, you know - - -

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MS PRICE: And, Martin, because it's now, and always has been, because it was a competitive tender process when it wasn't necessarily ever kind of equitable as far as what a State received considering the number of services, the regionality, all that sort of thing, we think there should be some sort of formula that looks at, okay, how many services are there in each State, what, you know, remoteness and all that sort of thing, and an assessment of how much then – we would say something like one full-time staff member to 30 services, but that is a massive, massive, increase on what we have at the moment.

35

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Really?

MS PRICE: Yes. So currently it's more like one to 60.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But that's to support the work that you do.

MS PRICE: That we currently do.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: What about the actual Inclusion Support payments to services?

5 MS PRICE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: What's your view there?

10 MS PRICE: We believe it should cover the number of hours the child's in the service rather than being limited to 25 hours a week, and pitched at a diploma level - - -

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Does it need to be – I presume it is child-specific in your view but, as you know, in the ISP sometimes it will be for one child or potentially for the service of multiple children.

MS PRICE: A number of children. Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So, therefore, it's no longer specifically child-stated. It'll become almost at the service level.

25 MS PRICE: Well, in the guidelines it's very confusing because you apply because of a, or a number of, child's needs but it's really meant to – the worker isn't meant to be focused on an individual child.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No.

30 MS PRICE: The worker's meant to be focused on how that child is supported and how all children are supported to have that child as part of a group. And I don't think – I don't think necessarily if there are a number of children with additional needs in a classroom it needs a number of additional educators because the number of adults, additional adults, doesn't necessarily work in the services, does it?

35 MS DAVISON: No. Sometimes it would be practical to say – so you might have – I mean certainly we would try and organise it this way. If you had in one group of children a couple of children who had additional needs and who would benefit from their being an additional educator in that team, we'd try and organise their day so that 25 hours for this child and 25 hours for that
40 child kind of ultimately covers the better part of the week. But, can I say, you know, last year we had a child who was attending five days per week, this child absconds quite frequently, so an additional person is, you know, definitely needed. We're funded for 25 hours a week but that child was attending, you know, upward of 40 hours. We're paid at \$23 an hour for that
45 additional educator. At our service, we're paying our additional educator \$30 an hour. That's a cost that's worn by the service and ultimately by all the families at that service.

MS PRICE: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Yes. Because as we're going into all the detail, and it's probably my mistake, we're probably another 10 minutes or so
- - -

MS PRICE: Okay.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So there's three topics you want to talk about. I don't know whether you wanted to go to the workforce matters since we've had other conversations at other points.

MS PRICE: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But I didn't want to lead you down to a path of whatever - - -

MS PRICE: Yes. Probably outside school hours, yes. just because - - -

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Sure. Let's have a conversation.

MS PRICE: You possibly don't hear as much about outside school hours care as - - -

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: We take a great interest in it. Yes.

MS PRICE: Yes. Yes. And we appreciate that and can see that in the report as well. So we believe that supporting school-aged children through quality recreation and leisure programming can improve the social, emotional and health outcomes for children. And we also know that about 13 and a half per cent of Australian children between four and 11 are experiencing a mental health disorder with anxiety and ADHD being the two most common conditions in that age group. Outside school hours care programs with appropriately qualified staff can support children's complex needs as well as work in conjunction with school support services to connect families and children to appropriate professional assistance. We believe that the outside school hours care services should be much more involved and wedded into the school system.

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

MS PRICE: We did like your recommendation in the initial report about the States taking more responsibility about ensuring that outside school hours care is seen much more as a part of the school community and the responsibility because we see when they are school-run outside school hours services when the principals really see the value, they can be working on the

improvement plans for schools as well as the outside school hours care service in conjunction it can work really well for the children and families in those services. There are times when the outside school hours care service have much more engagement with families than the teachers in the school because they're seeing them at the beginning and at the end of the day.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: When you say 'school-run' you mean - - -

MS PRICE: Yes. So lots – they are run either by the parents and citizen or the school council.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Okay.

MS PRICE: Rather than being outsourced to a third-party provider.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Okay.

MS PRICE: So it's much the same as the community managed versus the larger not-for-profit or the for-profit to - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: What kind of proportion of outside school hours care is of that nature? In say in Victoria or - - -

MS PRICE: It's even – it's smaller than the long daycare centre. So I think we're down to about 35 per cent are school-run. Because a few – that's contributed to because the Catholic system decided to outsource all of those – about all their OHSC services some time ago – six, seven years ago or so. But, yes, that integration we see as really important, and I think it's – I think you asked a question of my colleague, Michelle, in Sydney about that national quality framework, is it fit for purpose - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MS PRICE: - - - for the outside school hours care. We see it as being fit at the moment in the short term because there's no other framework. We think a review is required really to go, what are the core components, as opposed to here's the NQS or how does – how do we need to tweak it for outside school hours care which it (indistinct words) happening.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But I think our impression has been from some people who've engaged with us that outside school hours care feels like a bit of an add-on, and feels embedded in practices and reporting requirements that are more appropriate for children below school age that are potentially in service for extended hours, whereas we're hearing about teachers and educators have to report on children's learning outcomes, so whenever – in outside school hours care and they may be over there for half an hour or - - -

MS PRICE: Half an hour. Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So that's the sort of view that we're interested in.

MS PRICE: Yes. That's right. And certainly, I think if there was a review of the NQS and the looking at, okay, well what is really core to the learning and development in those services? Then it could be managed, or if then the
10 whole education system changes and outside school hours care is much more embedded in the school day like they are in other countries across the world where there's pedagogues that look after the recreation and leisure time of children. So they're looking after before school, breaks in – you know, morning tea, lunch and after school, they're much more embedded in the
15 whole school system, seeing that central and core, then maybe the NQF wouldn't be necessary. But until that happens, long term, that's where we're heading, and we believe we should be heading that way because that's going to provide the best outcomes for children. It's a bit like before and after kindergarten care. How is that not long daycare, or why are we not looking
20 at, you know, the whole day and the whole living experience of children? Just because we do that for before and after-school care doesn't mean it's the best model. It doesn't mean it's the best model or outcomes for children.

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Would you like a couple more minutes, Julie? I don't know if you'd like to (indistinct words).

MS PRICE: Yes. Sure. Sure. And certainly, we're very supportive of
30 further investigations and recommendations as far as supply-side funding to deliver universal high-quality education and care. We certainly don't believe that the CCS model is a way that incentivises high-quality education and care, whereas we see that supply-side funding can be used much more as a lever to that.

35 COMMISSIONER GROPP: I guess goes to your earlier point though about an Inclusion Support which is a supply side – it's linked (indistinct words) where it's essentially a supply-side funded model, but it goes to what governments are prepared to put into it.

40 MS PRICE: That's right. That is right. And if it replaces some of the CCS to make the service universally acceptable – accessible then it may not necessarily be having to be an addition on top of the childcare subsidy budget that sits there at the moment.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It's kind of an interesting observation, Julie, just your comments earlier around the Inclusion Support, are illustrative of what could happen if – the whole thing is underfunded.

5 MS PRICE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And there's no other source. And that supply-side funding - - -

10 MS PRICE: Yes. There are fees.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, that is supply-side funding.

MS PRICE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You could charge individually - - -

MS PRICE: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - the parent with the child who has additional needs but, you know, they won't come, that there needs – they don't actually. They're excluded, et cetera.

MS PRICE: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And so Lisa's point, which is – and this is the challenge that, at least in my mind, in thinking about different funding sources because we could all envisage the best scenario – and wouldn't that be great. But, in fact, there are so many examples where over time those best scenarios they've been whittled away or, you know - - -

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: (Indistinct words) funding - - -

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - so your point about eight years it hasn't gone up and - - -

MS PRICE: Yes.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - that's a limit, and it's not to say that demand-side funding doesn't have its problems either.

MS PRICE: Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You know, they all have trade-offs and benefits.

MS PRICE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: At its core, they go to an issue of is there enough funding, I suppose.

5 MS DAVISON: Yes. But if you consider that – there's a few things here. If you consider that by far and away the biggest expenditure for any early years service is going to be in salaries and related costs.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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MS DAVISON: So for our services, it's probably over 85 per cent. In other services, it'll be less, but it's still the majority of funding. If you consider that the old operational subsidy was really targeted at that, and if you consider as well that one of the biggest predictors of quality is to do with your educator team, how many there are and what their qualifications are, how well

15 resourced they are, what opportunities they have to build those connections and relationships with children and families. So that - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And that used to be what the funding was.

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MS DAVISON: Indeed.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: In the 1970s it was linked to award wages.

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MS DAVISON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Of the staff required for the service, according to the regs.

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MS DAVISON: So if you think about – if you say well there's a pot of money and our objective is ensuring that there's high-quality education and care available for every child who – in the country. I was going to say who needs it, but I think every child needs it. Then – and you say, well – because at the moment we're in this terrible chasing your tail situation, where money is added to the child care subsidy pot, but services are trying to, you know,

35 pay their staff appropriately and employ enough – the numbers of staff appropriately, and how – the qualifications that you need, and that inevitably raises the costs. It's almost dollar for dollar. So then you have families and others complaining that there was an increase to childcare subsidy and that's

40 been eaten up by an increase to costs. Well, we shouldn't be surprised, and there needs to be a better way of addressing that than just chasing our tail on the fees to families. It is about government responsibility to say this is a government responsibility. We don't expect parents to pay child school fees for all school children and we need to remember that this is about early

45 education and care, and early education should be supported by government.

MS PRICE: That's a nice spot to finish on.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed. We are out of time.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We very much welcome the input that you've had, so thank you for today and for every other interaction that we've had. The perspectives are very helpful to us, they've grouped together our thinking and we will hopefully see that in our draft report and you'll see it in our final report.

10 MS PRICE: Absolutely.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But, there are many things that you say that we agree with and there are challenges and there you're raising which I don't know whether we actually have solutions yet in mind, and maybe it's a process to move towards a solution just as with the multi-employer bargaining process is a process as opposed to an end outcome.

20 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: This time around it's not been an end outcome. It's the first step.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

25 MS PRICE: Yes. Yes. Thank you very much for all your engagement and I've certainly appreciated the opportunity to engage with you. It's been really important and - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, as a parent whose children went to a community child care centre - - -

30 MS DAVISON: Good on you.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and as a father who served on one of these parental committees as the treasurer for five years, I know exactly where you're coming from and more power to you because it's fantastic as community building and the care and the love that the community and the centres have shown, at least to my children. That's for every child then it's - - -

40 MS DAVISON: That's great to hear. That's great to hear.

MS PRICE: Yes. Thank you so much. Thanks for your time.

MS DAVISON: Thank you.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you. Anne and Brigid, I don't know if you wanted to come and join us. Come on in. I know it seems a bit formal but - - -

DR KENNEDY: You know us by now. It's a bit like a congressional hearing.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We're trying not to but it - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: No. We're trying to look scary but - - -

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: There's no McCarthy questions here. Senate estimates, that's a blood sport. The main reason for this is that we're actually having and taking transcripts for the hearings and so I need to have the audio, and we also are on screen and it's being televised, and anybody can join as, in fact, you did yesterday. We saw you in the background. So, thank you - - -

15 DR KENNEDY: I forgot to turn my camera off.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well you got caught out before the camera went off.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: As soon as I mentioned RCT you just appeared.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: (Indistinct words). I thought you might be able to join in and - - -

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Again, perhaps, just the formalities. I think you know who we are, but Martin Stokie is my name. I'm one of the commissioners responsible for our enquiry into early childhood and community care, joined on my right by Commissioner Brennan and Commissioner Gropp, who you've met before. But for the record and for the transcript if you could just mention – state your name and the organisation.
30 We have around 45 minutes or thereabouts, and so if you had an opening statement or something that you wanted to say we're very happy, or you perhaps, seeing us talk with others as well, and so we're a little bit in your hands. We probably have a series of questions undoubtedly around how are
35 you going on your current projects and research. But equally, you've lived and breathed this area for a very long time and you might have some very specific comments on our draft report and our recommendations or the areas of information request or perspectives. We're open ears and we're in your hands. So I'll hand over if you can introduce yourselves and then we'll sit
40 and listen for a bit and we can have a conversation.

DR KENNEDY: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Good.

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DR KENNEDY: Well, we'll start by introductions - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Please. That would be good.

5 DR KENNEDY: - - - for the purpose of people who are listening in. I'm Dr Anne Kennedy and I'm interim chair of Parkville Institute, which is an innovative research and practice institute. We established in 2021.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Brigid Jordan, Executive Director of Parkville Institute.

10 DR KENNEDY: So we have got an opening statement.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Fantastic.

15 DR KENNEDY: I will kind of probably read from it.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. For sure, want to hear it.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You're welcome to.

20 DR KENNEDY: And we would like to begin by acknowledging that we're meeting on Wurundjeri lands today and we pay our respects to the elders past and present. And Parkville Institute thanks the Commissioners for the opportunity to have this conversation with you today.

25 We welcome your draft report and insights, and particularly the recommendation for adopting a national stewardship approach under the direction of an early childhood commissioner in order to build a system of quality early childhood education and care for all children, a system that is theoretically and evidence-informed to address current inequity of access,
30 affordability and quality.

We'd like to acknowledge our funders, the Australian Government; the Department of Education, Victoria; The Paul Ramsay Foundation; The Wigg Family Foundation, as our funding partners; Social Ventures Australia, as our
35 systems and co-development partner; SNAICC, as our co-development partner and cultural advisor; Uniting Vic. Tas; C&K Queensland; the City of Ballarat, Victoria; and Cullunghutti Child and Family Centre, Nowra, our service provider partners. These partners support our purpose and share our commitment to changing the life trajectories of children living with
40 significant social disadvantage and family stress so that they enter school education equally to their peers.

Parkville Institute's replication research, which is informed by implementation science principles, is building on the evidence from the
45 randomised controlled trial of the EYEP. EYEP was initiated by Kids First, previously the Children's Protection Society, an independent not-for-profit child and family service organisation based in the northeast of Melbourne

which was founded in 1896. The program was designed and implemented by CPS in collaboration with my colleague, Associate Professor Brigid Jordan and myself.

5 The terms 'disadvantaged, vulnerability and low SES' fail to convey the complexity of the lives of the families and children we are working with, families, who are the most marginalised, often invisible, disconnected families in the country. The child and family cohort we are working with are living with both significant family stress and social disadvantage and they are
10 eligible for ACCS (Child Wellbeing) funding. In a context where child and family health, mental health, welfare and early education and care services are stretched to provide the level of support and services required, especially because of workforce shortages, the demands on these overstretched systems are increasing. In our replication centres, we are witnessing rising and
15 disturbing levels of disadvantage, stress and serious risk factors which are requiring a significant increase in highly skilled care and responsiveness from the multidisciplinary senior leadership teams, teachers, educators and support staff.

20 Parkville Institute, the service providers and the replication centres' capacity to respond appropriately to the distress and the crises facing families is only possible because we have targeted cohort funding and embedded structural and process quality elements in the program. We are holding these families and children in a way that few others can do in the current system. In
25 addition to our replication research sites, we've been working with SNAICC, SVA and Cullunghutti Child and Family Centre in Nowra to co-develop, trial and evaluate a new intensive early childhood education and care model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The program is called Boori Milumba, which means 'child shine' in the local Dharawal language.

30 In the replication centres, and our co-development site, we witness the policy practice interface in action and the challenges that arise from a system that's not always designed for, or is not working effectively, to reduce the barriers for the most marginalised families and children to access and maintain
35 sustained engagement in early childhood education and care programs.

Thank you. So now we're in your hands.

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Thank you. Well, there's lots there I kept wanting to say in open, but just decided not to interrupt as you speak. You mentioned in your replication centre you're seeing increases in levels of disadvantage and additional requirements. I presume that's over and above what you saw last time. Is that right?

45 DR KENNEDY: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And maybe it's just a sign of the times and other factors, but what are you putting that down to?

5

DR KENNEDY: Well, I think it's a sign of the times.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

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DR KENNEDY: I think it's post-covid. I think it's the fact that all services are not able to meet these families' needs at the moment. They're stretched, as we said.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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DR KENNEDY: So it's difficult to get a bulk-billing GP appointment. It's difficult to see your mental health provider.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

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DR KENNEDY: It's almost impossible for these children.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So it seems a connection with every other aspect of their lives over and above the support that you're giving them in and around early childhood education and care - - -

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DR KENNEDY: Yes. Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and specifically for the child.

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DR KENNEDY: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Because obviously, you're extending beyond just the child, you're supporting families.

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DR KENNEDY: Yes. We're seeing more crises than we ever saw in the trial and it's quite – it is disturbing.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

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DR KENNEDY: And we can only do the work because of the way we're funded, and so that's our plea to the commission - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

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DR KENNEDY: - - - that you recommend the importance of cohort targeted funding, you know.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So am I right in thinking, Anne, as I read – and Brigid, as I read the document that you provided us that there's at least two really big challenges you're throwing back at us? One is about the supports that are required and need to be specified for the type of service that you offer, and you made that out for us and you've taken us back to the notion of proportionate universal or targeted universal - - -

10 DR KENNEDY: Targeted.

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But the second challenge – because it seems to me that you're talking to us about the rise in significant need and distress and vulnerability amongst families in the community that won't be reaching the services – are unlikely to have an opportunity to participate in services like yours. And so you're challenging us to think about those children, and I imagine the – for example, the educator, teacher preparation – that will be experienced by those who are going to staff mainstream – I'll call them mainstream – services, for want of a better word. So I think I've got a handle on the first of those challenges, which is about your type of service. 20 I've got – I'm less clear about what we should be thinking about, or you'd advise us to be recommending, in respect of the second challenge, but you might want to comment on both of those.

25 DR KENNEDY: I think in relation to the second challenge, and I'll just say I think your recommendations around looking at the quality and the research agenda and looking at the funding again, are - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's getting us there.

30 DR KENNEDY: Yes. That's taking you in the right direction.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay. And the pre-service training and - - -

35 DR KENNEDY: Absolutely. Absolutely. And the other issue that we've picked up is that professional development – ongoing access to professional development is often overlooked in the structural elements of quality, but it's critical, and for educators and teachers to have the availability for that they need time away from children on a regular basis in our centre every day, because that – that's good for a whole lot of reasons, including your own 40 wellbeing and reducing burn out. But it's also important because then they can have the mentorship coaching, a sustained PD. They can do the networking with other professionals. They can access the reflective supervision that we provide, et cetera.

45 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So is it the case that you're saying well, you know, we've got lots of – this wouldn't be – quite do justice to our draft

report, but lots of exhalations around professional development and your development, but you're saying we'd need to go further to make that - - -

5 DR KENNEDY: I think you need to go further in terms of the quality of it. There's a lot of professional development out there. There's unlimited resources, and a lot of it's free but a lot of it's not hitting the mark. It's not building that professional capacity to work with complex families and complex children. You need to, you know, the fly in fly out, the one-day session, or virtual training, they are not – well, hit the mark and really elevate the quality of the workforce to where we need the workforce to be to get the education outcomes, to get the wellbeing outcomes, to get the developmental outcomes.

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay. Thank you.

DR KENNEDY: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Actually, I want to go to the first point of what you – about the, sort of, target and the cohort, and in your model the – is it the children and families that are eligible for top-up funding, so they don't have to pay anything. But then you need additional funding to provide the – what sort of, kind of, quantum are we talking about there, and we've proposed – we've sort of proposed expansion of CCCF, which would be to provide services in deserts, in areas of complex need though, not just necessarily by geographic location, or extra special needs. Do you think that's one way of doing that, providing those sort of more targeted services in additional needs areas, or have we got that – we're missing something there?

25 DR KENNEDY: I think we – one model is definitely targeted cohort focused, but we've got a particular model, but I think there's possibly other models.

30 COMMISSIONER GROPP: We don't want to be said to be – you want it to be flexible so that - - -

35 DR KENNEDY: Yes. Yes. Because remote areas and – if you're talking remote areas then you're probably looking at co-development sort of work.

40 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

DR KENNEDY: We've absolutely committed to that. We think that's important. We're part – we're developing reports from our work that will help others, I think, in terms of co-development, journey, framework and the model itself. So they will be publicly available.

45 COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

DR KENNEDY: But I think the other issue to think about it's – sometimes people think if it's no cost then they'll come. That's not what we find. You need incredible outreach. These are invisible families, they are marginalised, they don't just suddenly get up one morning and say, 'I'll think I'll send my child to child care' or 'I think I'll find a nice kindergarten'. That's beyond their capacity for that, and it takes considerable outreach and maybe other innovative models to kind of bring them - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: We spoke with Sharon Goldfeld yesterday and she was really making that point to us as well, that free is great but it's not enough.

DR KENNEDY: Yes. It's not enough. It's not enough. And we see that. And so a universal service wouldn't have the capacity – a coordinator as skilled as Linda there – wouldn't have the capacity to be on the phone for the hours and hours and to talk with the child protection units and the referrals that you need, the referral agencies you need, to say to a family we know of a program that might be good for you and your child, and to bring them, and to sustain that participation then. It takes a lot of effort.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: I think also there's a need to have the service funded so that they are funded to continue in time, as the family takes time to engage and say drop in then drop out. So a model of, you know, child unit-based funding is problematic from that point of view, because there's an allowable 42 absences, but they could be used up very quickly as the family deal with multiple crises, decide to trust – there's a blow-up because they're reported to child protection and they need to rebuild trust with the service, all those things. So there needs to be the – in fact the additional training and the time to think together about how they manage these difficult situations. And so that they are a sort of a stable anchor in the community that the families will engage with, and then it's kind of settled and the family develop the kind of processes and resources to attend. But, I mean, often the intention's there, but things like housing is much more stretched now – all of the services, as Anne made reference to. So there is kind of – there's no give in the family system and any crisis just tips the whole thing over, and I think that's what we're seeing. There's just less give, even in the most marginalised families. The group that we originally worked with, they're the same cohort, but they have just got more landing on them and there's less community resources to support them.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And it's the same level of support that's given – I mean, early education and care – so, five days a week, I think.

DR KENNEDY: Same dose.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Same – for three years - - -

DR KENNEDY: Three years. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And so that's starting at two years of age, is that correct?

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DR KENNEDY: No. Under one.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Under one?

10 DR KENNEDY: We recruit under three, and they get a three-year dose.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Under three. Okay. Right.

15 DR KENNEDY: So they could be a baby, they could be a two-year-old.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

DR KENNEDY: But under three.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Right. I'm just reminding myself of the program.

DR KENNEDY: Yes. Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: One of the things that (indistinct words) sort of is very strict on us, which is to don't – don't lead to generalise the results, don't lead to take what we've done in the first study but till we replicate it, which is what you're doing now. And I understand where he's coming from at the same level – and this is my question to you, which is well, what can we
30 take or do we just have to be patient? Because the length of time from when you first started to when you will finish and publish your replication is multiple generations of participation in early – you know, we are for the sake of perhaps, a globally interesting work where we're potentially delaying what we think – the early studies are very, very – well, you know, and I suspect
35 you already are starting to see potentially benefits coming through in your replication study, but it's maybe not publishable - - -

DR KENNEDY: We are seeing the benefits quite early and that is significant.

40

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: What can we take from there? What can we say now?

45 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: There's no question about the effectiveness, and there's a good opportunity to make a comment on something that was put to the commissioners yesterday about the study being

small. But small doesn't matter because a study only needs to have enough participants to test whether an intervention makes a difference or not.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Exactly.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: And if you get a large effect, like we did, you only need the small number.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: And it's unethical to put more families through it ... to spend resources. So small isn't a problem in that context - - -

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. It's just has to be big.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: So it's effective. I think that what we are saying is that we need to use implementation science before you try and roll out something like that too wide, because there are, I mean, for example, when we designed our replication trial it was – as COVID was just landing, it was significant.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

25 DR KENNEDY: We didn't have the kind of impacts from covid on workforce. You know, there are a whole lot of unknown unpredicted factors. So if we'd said put 400 in the country then that wouldn't have been very wise.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

DR KENNEDY: So what – the stage we're documenting now is can you recruit the same children, yes, and we're learning a lot about – we thought ACCS (Child Wellbeing) was going to be a good funding mechanism. We're learning it isn't. So it's just - - -

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: A good pre-marker for potential participants, is that what you mean? Is that - - -

40 DR KENNEDY: It doesn't – the barriers which you address in your report to families actually qualifying for ACCS (Child Wellbeing) for navigating the systems to get signed up, the 42 absences, all those things are problematic.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. Yes.

45 DR KENNEDY: So now we're saying we think it needs block funding - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay. Sorry. Sorry.

DR KENNEDY: Type of funding. So what I'm saying is in the process of this replication phase we are finding out some of those potential issues early – the workforce issues.

5

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

DR KENNEDY: And so I guess we think well we just need to do this replication trial once. We're doing it in different States. We're doing it with different service provider types, and then we'll just be much better informed for how the community's money should be spent in meeting the needs of these children.

10

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Because I have in my mind, and I've asked the question of you, well what can we take from it? But you've already outlined that you're not waiting until you've finished before you start engaging – you're working with SNAICC, we actually spoke about a little earlier today.

15

DR KENNEDY: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You're developing up a program codesigned in conjunction with the control groups, et cetera. I don't know whether that's going to be a trial - - -

DR KENNEDY: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - and a study in the sense of whether it's a - - -

DR KENNEDY: Yes. The children's outcomes are being evaluated by the same team that are evaluating - - -

30

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: By the same team?

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right. Okay.

35

DR KENNEDY: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And, therefore, is it a targeted limited effective sample but not a, you know, a broadly universal to the relevant cohort?

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DR KENNEDY: It's a good extension of the replication work because it's not a hybrid model. It's giving us experience and evidence around how you can work with a group of children in the centre who will be eligible for the model along with children who are not at risk.

45

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay.

5 DR KENNEDY: So there's equally a number of them – there is a small number of those children. But that is a good insight for us to see how that can work, and that sort of multiple funding models operating in the one service.

10 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: The evidence of children's outcomes, the children who participate who are ACCS (Child Wellbeing) eligible are Aboriginal and this is a service that builds on the already very good work being done by Cullunghutti and there are some more resources to put in extra elements, that will be generalisable to other Aboriginal community controlled centres.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. I suppose the – and you probably hear it in my question, and I'm sure you get this question all the time, which is, but when can we start to roll this out to everybody who would need it rather than the just keep testing good practice? Each time we are improving the knowledge, but we're only, as far as I can see, we're only impacting on a relatively small – I get it that we're trying to get reputable and authoritative and definitive insight and so rushing to the – which was (indistinct), so they don't rush because that will cause a problem, you'll do it wrong, you'll misfire and it'll be a retrograde step - - -

25 DR KENNEDY: It'll backfire.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But at the same time you can tell there's – you're working with the most vulnerable and the most challenged. They're a core focus of our report.

30 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: At the end of this replication there is no need to keep doing this careful, careful research. Like, one replication trial with three sites and the Aboriginal co-development trial should give us enough for government to then know what the pitfalls are, what the hiccups are, and we will know a lot about the training and the support that's required for the workforce as well.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So what's the (indistinct words) - - -

40 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Well, I just want to say what we want to know is what you – ideally, if you had the pen what would you be wanting us to put in this report? We mightn't be going to put it in, but we'd like to be really clear about what it is and we're wrapping up in a couple of months.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: In essence, yes.

DR KENNEDY: I think we can say because the randomised controlled trial was the gold standard work, and it was evaluated by the best people we could

possibly employ to do that evaluation – the University of Melbourne's – Melbourne Institute – and because we brought such expertise and multidisciplinary expertise, that we can be – we can look at what was achieved and we can look at the detail in that model and say there are

5 learnings for the universal. Now, so the attention we paid to the practices around transitions, around partnerships with families, setting goals together, the workforce training we did, the focus on nutrition, for example, meeting 75 per cent of those and we're seeing that's a big – that's a current issue for families today that are receiving - - -

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Certainly.

DR KENNEDY: And, indeed, malnutrition. I mean this is frightening stuff. So, you know, I think there are learnings, Martin, that we can - - -

15 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: That small group size.

DR KENNEDY: The small group sizes, you know.

20 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Primary educator.

DR KENNEDY: The primary educator system. You don't have to be a cohort and focus centre or a targeted centre to do some of those practices. Now, you might need some additional funding – yes. But there are practices

25 in our model that – and that was always the intention that we would not be so separate from the universal, that we would come under assessment and rating scheme, and we would adhere to the regulations, et cetera, so that there would be learning and there could be parallels with the work being done in usual care.

30 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And that's really helpful because, yes, we are suggesting effectively free for lower incomes. That's only one marker. It's

35 not going to be the only marker for potentially (indistinct).

DR KENNEDY: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But I just say that it's going to be of the majority of people at the lower income areas. But your point around the additional supports that need to come, the training of the staff that need to come, the extra focus on the support to come into the service in the first place.

40 DR KENNEDY: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So these are important things for us to think about, which is how we're targeting – sorry, wanting to focus on those who aren't coming - - -

5 DR KENNEDY: Yes. One of the other issues for participation is that we're still experiencing the silos between child protection welfare services and our service, early childhood education and care service, it is quite difficult for us to get referrals from child protection.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

DR KENNEDY: And we have been working very assiduously on that; whereas where in Victoria, for example, we get really good referral systems from Enhanced Maternal and Child Health. That seems to be a service that
15 some of our families do use and we've found that they've been very good referrers. So that's – you know, the free is one thing but the outreach to find those families and make sure they engage does need some thinking, and I think we've got some insights into that, how you go about that.

20 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: I don't understand why you don't get referrals from child protection.

DR KENNEDY: The system – I think the system is so stretched and there are so many challenges, you know, our service providers have met with them
25 and we've reached out to them, we've had afternoon teas for them to come, and we still find it challenging.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Is the process for them difficult?

30 DR KENNEDY: No. They have to write one letter, and we give them a template. So not - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay.

35 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: But I also think – and I think this is important for thinking about co-located services and, you know, the other – I'm a social worker and, you know, worked in multidisciplinary teams at the Children's Hospital for yonks and, I'm a child mental health clinician, and it seems to me that what's very hard for workers in many organisations
40 currently is to take the time to have kind of meaningful conversations with their colleagues in other services. So child protection and social workers are so stretched there isn't half an hour in your day, or an hour at the end of the day, where they could pick up the phone and say, 'Can you tell me a bit more about your service?' or 'Could I pop in?' Or, if they've brought a child to the
45 service, or had a meeting then they've then got to rush off to court or rush off to another meeting. They can't say, 'Can I stay a bit longer?' So I think that the knitting together of different agencies, different disciplines at the kind of

community service provision level, I just don't think there's enough bandwidth in the system to do it and it feels different to 20 years ago, or 30 years ago. I mean, people have always been busy, rushed off their feet, and there's always been too much work but it just seems to be worse and high turnover in services like child protection means that the players don't stay long enough for there to be meaningful conversations for the next time you want to refer someone or enquire about a service, or - - -

DR KENNEDY: The other learning for the universal, I think, would be around the multidisciplinary nature of our staff, and I think for services where there are high numbers of children with disadvantage and risk – and they can be identified, they're identifiable. I think the embedded services of a family support practitioner and an infant mental health specialist cannot be underestimated. I think that's something you could look at.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Were the two you mentioned infant mental health and what was the other?

DR KENNEDY: Family support practitioner.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

DR KENNEDY: Because they can do some of the outreach work and, you know, that – there's tasks they can do that are not the remit of an early childhood teacher and educator.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No.

DR KENNEDY: We don't want them to be social workers or infant mental health clinicians, we want them to be informed by that work, but we want to protect their capacity to be good teachers and educators of children. So our infant mental health practitioner does an assessment of the child in terms of what the child might have experienced, in their home, their capacity for relationships, their attachment history, et cetera. That information's given to the teachers and educators and they tell me normally this would take a long time to find out.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

DR KENNEDY: And then I – but now I've got it so I can start that child's transition orientation individually – I know what I'm likely to experience and see, and I can be prepared in terms of pedagogy and curriculum. So they can also – the teachers and educators also use the infant mental health consultant as a – someone they can reflect with. You know, I've been experiencing this with this child and I'm not getting – I feel like I could do better, you know, what do you think and they can be in the room and have a look and – they can also – the family support practitioner then supports families to engage

with local services because we're not a one-stop shop. We don't do clinical work for families in the centre, but we connect them up because our argument is we want to capacity build the family to seek those services and sustain engagement of those services.

5

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And to reach beyond.

DR KENNEDY: Because we're not there all the time, and we think that's a good model.

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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: It can also like help the family to see someone in a helping role as actually helpful. But they may have had many experiences where they're very distrustful, and because the centre is about the children, and the focus is on the children, provide education for the children in a partnership with parents they, kind of, slowly build their trust and then they can reach out.

15

Having these roles embedded means there can be ongoing input into the professional capacity, as in skills, of the teachers and educators as well. One of the – I think in the model because of the changes over the last decade, I think we underestimated how much of those roles is required. So we said two days a week, and it's not enough, basically. It needs to be more. And the other thing is that you then have this kind of culture in the centre of receptivity to families and where the teachers and educators, the coordinator, the pedagogical leader, everybody feels able to receive the family with all their troubles, and then the family start telling you, which is why there are more crises to be dealt with because the families trust enough and so they actually disclose what's going on.

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DR KENNEDY: They disclose.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: For them personally, ...their mental health challenges, child protection issues, because it feels safe..., family violence, the risk. But then you've got more to deal with that you may not have to in a universal setting where the families just don't tell you.

35

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Sort of, thank goodness. Because you don't have the resources to deal with it in as comprehensive a way as required.

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COMMISSIONER GROPP: When we met I recall you saying over – one important factor was that children attended five days a week, and that was – that regularity was really important. Is that something that's still coming through? Like, is that something you think is transferable?

45

DR KENNEDY: Yes. Yes. We feel regular, five days, shorter days - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Shorter days.

5 DR KENNEDY: - - - is much more effective than two or three long days.
We like to send the children home in good shape, not exhausted and ratty and
completely exhausted. It is exhausting to be in a large group for a long day.
It's exhausting for the adult let alone little people. So that's one part of it.
The other part is, and the families say this to us, 'We like the structure.' One
10 mum said recently, 'This is the first time I've had structure in my life. I have
to get up every day. I have to bring them here'. And we think that is a good
structure and a good way of operating that will take that child into school.

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It's a modelling kind of - - -

DR KENNEDY: Modelling how to do it, how to get – and, of course, over
time the children get quite good at doing that themselves. We build their
own agency, so children say – said in the trial, you know, 'Teach me how to
wash my hair, teach me how to cut my lunch.' You know, they knew –
20 children have got agency. They know what they need to get there. And so if
we built the child's capacity and the parent's capacity that will be a very good
foundational skill for school, and we know that a lot of these children don't
go to school, as well. Our replication sites are telling us that the child's
brought – a child that's coming into the replication centre comes in, but the
25 staff see that there are school-aged children in the car, still in their pyjamas,
who are, obviously, not going to school.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

30 DR KENNEDY: But the mum somehow or other's got enough – or feels
supported and welcome in the centre. It's all of that sense of belonging that
matters, that – from the receptionist through to everyone in the centre making
that family feel welcome, making the child feel welcome, that motivates that
parent to bring the child despite what's going on, but maybe not with the
35 school. So we think that's important.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. You were mentioning embedding
family support practitioners and infant mental health staff. And I can see,
you know, if I were to control the federal budget I might do that. But I'm
40 thinking realistically – I don't mean to say that you're not realistic, but just in
terms of thinking about where we could go with ideas like that, they're not
going to be – there may not be a lot of infant mental health practitioners for a
start, I don't know. But we're not going to be able to locate people with those
skills in a lot of services. If they're not in the service, is there somewhere else
45 they can be that's helpful to a community?

DR KENNEDY: I would think they are best in the service, but maybe they could be shared in several services.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

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DR KENNEDY: So if you were – say if you were taking a regional town like Morwell or Moe or Ballarat or Bendigo where we know there are high numbers of children facing disadvantage, then you might – then the embedding makes the difference, because particularly for both professions, both the early childhood professionals see and feel more trustful of someone. We don't want them to come in and be the expert because then the early childhood people give up on their own expertise, and that's not what we want. But we also want the social worker/family support practitioner just as Brigid and I have learnt from each other, and respect each other's different disciplines, and how they can work together for these children. So I think, you know, I would say yes putting in the - - -

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: You can also make a recommendation about more funding to be available to train those professionals, and particularly to train them in working with very young children. Because people have to self-fund infant mental health training, there's not a lot of it around.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. In regards to infant mental health training, where do you do that?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Well, I must declare I was part of establishing the course that Victoria now offers through Mindful. But it's a full fee-paying course, people have to self-fund.

30

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes. Okay.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: And again, this is a silo, you see, for mental health.

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DR KENNEDY: I guess the other recommendation for universal land and for training, in general, is that we mustn't overlook the specialisation of working with under threes. So we've tended to focus on the - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Others have said that, yes.

DR KENNEDY: - - - fours and fives and the preschool, but for these children that's a long time to wait and the harm is accumulating, the damage is accumulating, and it's going to take much more work to address than if we had more people who were highly skilled infant toddler specialists, teachers and educators.

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5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Teachers and educators, yes. And, I mean, one of the challenges – and you'd be very familiar with this – is the nature of pre-service training because especially in universities where you might be doing a zero to 12 course where teaching the early childhood component is quite minor.

DR KENNEDY: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Child development is very minor, let alone these kinds of critical issues that you're alerting us to.

15 DR KENNEDY: So often what I've seen is because those core subjects have been cut back and they're less equipped as graduates to deal with the learning and development needs of very young children, and particularly young children who have got complex family stressors and disadvantage and risks. So I guess it's mainly, you know, if we could make that a specialism that's something that you would aspire to do and that you would be remunerated adequately for that work, that could help. We're like paediatricians, it's not a downward slide to be a paediatrician. So we would like the same approach in 20 early childhood that the younger the children you work with, indeed, the more skills perhaps, the more training, the more specialised knowledge you need to have, yes.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you. Only a couple more minutes. Is there anything else that you wanted to raise with us today that we haven't raised yet?

30 DR KENNEDY: One thing I would like to raise, we do like your recommendation of an early childhood commissioner, and we would prefer the early childhood commissioner and not an ECD commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: We're hearing a lot of discussion about this topic.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You mean an ECEC commissioner rather than an early childhood development commissioner?

DR KENNEDY: Yes. And we've got - - -

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, the first we heard that recommendation yesterday, and it's only one who has recommended that.

45 DR KENNEDY: We think an early childhood education and care commissioner is important because we think what you have raised is that there's a lot of unfinished business in this sector around quality, affordability, access, and we want that person to be able to focus on that.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: I'm really interested to hear that from you because I would have thought the opposite. I would have thought you'd be concerned about us putting another silo effectively around ECEC when so much of the advocacy is around connecting ECEC with everything else.

DR KENNEDY: No. I don't see it that way. It's really important that that commissioner can do the depth rather than going broadly out there. Early childhood education is already the poor relation in the education sector.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: That's for sure.

DR KENNEDY: And I would think there's a risk if we go into these bigger areas that have got much more status, much more investment, that we will get sidelined and get marginalised even more so than it is now.

15 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Well, really good to hear your views on that.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: And I have learnt from Anne to speak about learning, not development. And, you know, learning is as important as development. And pedagogical theory and practice and, you know, there's a need to kind of recognise and honour those skills, I think, and not have them silenced because of - - -

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DR KENNEDY: But the work we're doing is to support children to enter school as learners and competent as learners, and we can do that work. And, yes, that's the commitment.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you very much.

DR KENNEDY: Thank you.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: When will you be finished with your replication study if you ever will be?

DR KENNEDY: Well, we'll have first-year results when?

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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Probably about 18 months.

DR KENNEDY: Eighteen months. It's not that far.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Eighteen months will be that report. And then the second report will be 12 months after that, yes.

45

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And have you been following the cohort from your first study through as well into their schooling years?

5 DR KENNEDY: Not beyond (indistinct).

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: Not beyond (indistinct), yes.

10 DR KENNEDY: We would like to do some data linkage work with NAPLAN and - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

DR KENNEDY: HILDA data maybe.

15 DR KENNEDY: Again, we just need funding for that.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, one of the things that the commission would have some insight into and support, notwithstanding (indistinct) role, is to support a research program that is actually very focused around what works.

25 DR KENNEDY: Exactly.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: That's at least from our perspective or my perspective is. That's where you want to fund, and that's what you want to give the primacy to. Not that other research isn't valid or otherwise, but coming back to a policy perspective, how can we make it work.

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DR KENNEDY: Yes.

35 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: And measuring children's outcomes, observable, testable, measurable children's outcomes rather than feel good - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

40 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JORDAN: - - - broad signals, and using clinical researchers to do that research, researchers who know how to interact with children as well, ...more expensive.

DR KENNEDY: We could keep this conversation going but - - -

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You'll be employed for the next 100 years. Thank you.

DR KENNEDY: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: For everybody else, we might just pause our public hearings for a brief break, and we will reconvene at 3 o'clock, so in 12 minutes or thereabouts. And hopefully, we'll see everybody back shortly. Thank you.

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SHORT ADJOURNMENT

[2.48 PM]

RESUMED

[3.01 PM]

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Welcome back. We've had a very short break, a little interlude, and we'll recommence now. And hopefully, we are being joined by Skye from Children and Young People with Disability Australia. CYDA, is that correct?

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MS KAKOSHKE-MOORE: Skye speaking, can you hear me?

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: We can hear you.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We can hear you.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But we can't see you.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You can take yourself off – or put your camera on and off you. So thank you for joining us. You're our first online participant today, everybody else has been in person. I think we have – well, we might have had one additional online, and we've had a lot of onlines throughout the hearings. I don't know whether you've been able to join earlier, Skye, but for your benefit it's - - -

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MS KAKOSHKE-MOORE: No. I haven't, I'm sorry.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: A bit like yourself, there may well be people who have joined online and they can be observing. This is a public hearing. By way of introduction, I should have just said first up, my name is Martin Stokie, I'm one of the Commissioners responsible for our inquiry into early childhood education and care. I'm joined on my right – perhaps, your left, I'm not sure – Deborah Brennan.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Hi, Skye.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And on my left is Lisa Gropp. You have three commissioners here in front of you. I'm going to throw to you very shortly just to – first of all, for the transcript just to introduce yourself. So we are recording these sessions not visually, but just the written transcript, and that will be made available on our website in due course as are all of the other public hearings that we've had and that we will have in the coming days and weeks.

10 So I might throw to yourself to introduce yourself, your organisation. You're welcome to make a statement or an introductory comment. We have a whole series of, well, draft recommendations and you might want to comment on those and information requests in our report. We also thank you for your input to date, and as well as coming along today. So, Skye, we're a little bit in your hands. This is a listening tour from us, and we might have questions after your comments.

15 MS KAKOSHKE-MOORE: Okay. Skye speaking. Thank you so much, Commissioners, for having CYDA along today and for facilitating our participation online. We're very grateful for that. I do have an opening statement I would like to read. It may take five minutes or a bit more, but I'd be grateful if I'm able to go through it and then I really welcome your questions after that.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: That's perfectly fine. No. That's pretty consistent with everybody else so, you know – yes.

25 MS KAKOSHKE-MOORE: Great. And because I'm online and because technology is the way that it is, if I drop out or my internet goes a little funny, if you can just raise your hands or something to give me a cue that I'm no longer with you, that would be great.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I can see you and hear you perfectly at the moment so - - -

35 MS KAKOSHKE-MOORE: Great, thank you. So as I said a little earlier, my name is Skye Kakoshke-Moore, I'm the CEO at Children and Young People with Disability Australia, or CYDA. So I'd like to start by really thanking you, Commissioners Gropp, Stokie and Brennan for the opportunity to be here today.

40 As the CEO of CYDA, we're dedicated to championing the rights and needs of children and young people with disability, so it's both an honour and a responsibility to give evidence to this inquiry today. As you'd be aware, we're at a crucial juncture in deciding what path to take with early childhood education and care. It's an area of policy and programs that profoundly impacts the lives of our most precious resource, and that's our children.

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5 The title of the draft report, 'A Path to Universal ECEC', strikes at the heart of what we believe is our collective commitment to inclusivity, equality, and opportunity for all children irrespective of their abilities or backgrounds. For too long children with disability have encountered systemic barriers injuring their access to the ordinary childhood experiences, whether it be the sandpit, finger painting, making local friends, sharing blocks, listening to stories, all these things that occur in their local community quality education and care service. This inquiry and your final report represents a chance to catalyse change to forge a path towards a future where every child can thrive and flourish.

15 Our vision at CYDA is clear, to advocate tirelessly for policies and practices that empower children with disability to reach their full potential. We firmly believe that early childhood education and care represents not only a fundamental right but also a cornerstone of lifelong success and well-being. Research unequivocally demonstrates the profound impact of early experiences and development in shaping outcomes for children, laying the foundation for future academic achievement, social and emotional connections, and economic security.

20 Significant gaps persist in the provision of inclusive education, early childhood education and care. Too many families continue to grapple with limited options, inadequate resources, and entrenched stigmas that undermine their child's opportunities for learning and growth. As we convene today, it's incumbent upon us to confront these challenges head-on, to interrogate the structural inequities that perpetuate exclusion, and create a path towards a more just and equitable future.

30 In our testimony today we will highlight CYDA's recommendations to ensure that your final report calls for high-quality, accessible and inclusive early childhood education and care. The recommendations that we're highlighting for you are CYDA recommendation number 1, which is to embed an anti-ableism framework into the ECEC sector including undertaking a co-designed, multi-stakeholder process to define a series of anti-ableist principles for use across the ECEC sector and an external organisation or coalition or organisations to undertake a review of each principle to ensure their adherence to anti-ableist principles.

40 CYDA recommendation number 2, which is about prioritising the voice of children with disability, we believe this can be achieved by including them, being children, in the ordinary places of childhood from the earliest possible opportunity and providing an alternative to the polished pathway, one that is paved in a way that is accessible and inclusive of children with disability and their families. I'll return to the concept of the polished pathway shortly in my opening statement.

5 The other recommendations that we would like to draw your attention to consider the potential impact of strengthening aspects of the final report by looking at CYDA recommendation number 3, which is the complete abolition of any activity requirements for childcare subsidy, and also being really mindful of the opportunity here to bring in the broader landscape with the recommendations made in the report. This could be done by making particular reference to and aligning with Australia's Disability Strategy and the targeted action plan for early childhood, that is CYDA recommendation number 18.

10 The Inclusion Support Program Review report and the current absence of a government response to that report, CYDA recommendations 9, 10, and 13 go to that. And the somewhat recently published NDIS Review and the need to guarantee children with disability to remain in the NDIS until viable and effective early childhood approaches are available for all and ensuring that the NDIS is fit for purpose for children, that's CYDA recommendation number 26. An introduction of the disability standards for education and any standards applied to ECEC should also be fit for purpose, so that speaks to CYDA recommendations 23, 24, and 25.

20 Sorry, just bear with me. When we talk about our recommendations and the experiences of young people and families, we think it's important to provide some, I suppose, context for the commission and for people in the hearing to understand really what those experiences are like. And so research consistently demonstrates that children and young people with disability fare less well than their peers and that these inequities start early and can have lifelong implications. In surveys run by CYDA in 2022 and 2023, we heard that while 83 per cent of families indicated their child was welcomed in ECEC settings, nearly 30 per cent reported exclusion from excursions, events or activities, and about the same number reported bullying from other children or even staff. One in five respondents reported that their child had been refused enrolment, and nearly a quarter said that their child had been limited in the number of hours they were allowed to attend.

35 So against that backdrop of experience and reform, we do have some calls for action that we would encourage the commission to consider. Failing to include children from the earliest possible chance can set them on what disability advocates, led by Inclusion Australia, describe as 'the polished pathway'. A path to universal ECEC that is accessible and inclusive of children with disability and their families is critical to avoiding the segregation and exclusion experienced on this polished pathway. The polished pathway leaves children with disability mainly invisible to their peers, being non-disabled and same-age children, from early childhood.

45 The pathway directs and guides children and young people from therapeutic segregation to segregated schools, to segregated employment, segregated housing, and segregated further life. Imagine if children though, were

supported in their local communities to enjoy and fully participate in the everyday, embracing new life, playing with friends, developing new skills and starting school. Imagine if when a baby is born their family opens a welcome baby box that includes a storybook about inclusion and diversity, and a roadmap to supports in their local community, and a message of support. Imagine if all children and families could access high-quality, inclusive, and well-resourced early education and care, and that it's delivered in local places with community supports and specialist advice.

Together, let us dare to imagine a world where every child, regardless of ability, enjoys the full benefits of early childhood education and care. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you very much, Skye. Are you happy if we, sort of, have a conversation now and delve into some of these points?

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You might have read in our draft report that we were relatively light on in our discussion in and around, I suppose, children specifically with disabilities. We knew that the NDIS review was shortly to be coming out, but it was published after our report. I think it was finalised before our draft went out, but it was published after we put it out.

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So we didn't wish to have too much to say in that respect. And I'm just wondering in light – and I have no doubt I'm sure you've read that review and looked at their direction, and even though it's relatively high level I know that it's clear the direction that they wish to go into, just wondering what thoughts you have in response to that inquiry as it relates to early childhood education and care? We're grappling with, well what does that mean? And what does it mean for the sector, or what could it look like? In fact, we'll probably finish our work, which is mid-this year, before the more formal, considered, detailed statements that are coming out in response to the NDIS review.

Anyway, I thought I'd take you there first and foremost, and then we can continue through into some of the things that you've raised, then inclusion support, the broader engagement and welcoming of all children regardless of their capacity and ability.

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. Skye speaking. Thank you so much. What a great question to start us off, because I think you've really gone right to the heart of an issue that at CYDA we encounter quite a lot, and that's the potential for disability to be siloed into disability-specific reforms. And so what I would encourage the commission to think about is how can the

commission really demonstrate that you can forefront disability as an issue with recommendations, and not leave it just to the NDIS or to state governments who are going to be tasked with funding and rolling out what the NDIS review considered to be foundational supports.

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What we saw recently was the publication of a report by the Universities Accord, so I know I've taken us from right at the start of a child's early education experience to what could be close to the end, but what we saw in that report was very much a reflection of low expectations placed on students with disability in the higher education context. What I think is really important for us to do at this point is to reflect that it's right for the sector, and for the government, and for the community to have high expectations for children with disability, and to recognise that this can be achieved in early childhood education and care with the appropriate supports provided for families and for those educators.

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So we know from our own research that achieving true inclusion in mainstream settings is beset with challenges. It doesn't mean it's impossible. But what we have with the early childhood experience is the fact that these children, it's their first time in a setting like this, and so let's take that opportunity to get that right, and to start finally putting in place some roadblocks, I suppose, on that polished pathway where children can end up just being set up for a life of segregation, because that's what they've experienced right from the start, and society isn't set up to really embrace them or to recognise the responsibility that we have to meet their needs.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You would have seen, Skye, in our report – well, hopefully, you might have seen that – and maybe it's an identification challenge, but the number of children who are attending early childhood education and care who have been identified, mainly through their educators and their teachers, as having some additional need, particularly disability, is actually quite high. It's not – I look at the data and I don't see, at least just in enrolment, a level of exclusion. Now, it might be that for those children who have greater needs, that is definitely the case.

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MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It troubles us when we hear examples of parents being turned away, or hours being restricted, and that's not what the program and or the sector should be doing, and that's concerning. But equally, there is quite a significant proportion who are coming at the moment. They might not be getting the support they need, and a whole range of other factors, but I'm just wondering, is that consistent with your understanding? Have we misread some of those? That is very early on, perhaps, identifying through non-clinical views. It's the educators and the teachers, but it is their perspective around who is coming and who is attending.

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MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. Skye speaking. Absolutely. What you've just summarised reflects back what we hear through our survey. So in my opening statement, I reported that when we speak to parents and caregivers, they're made initially to feel really welcome at their local ECEC setting. Like, there is – the providers are going in with the best of intentions, and with this desire to offer a truly inclusive environment for the child, but it's falling down in practice. And as you mention, there are some ways that exclusion can take place quite explicitly in terms of a denial of enrolment, or it can be more subtle. As you mentioned, not opening up as many hours, it might be just the messages that are sent home to parents that we don't think this is quite right for your child, putting it back on the parents to feel like it's something that they're to blame for. You know - - -

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Skye, and do you think that those – when that happens, is it predominately about access to funding? What is the reason? Is it just money, or is it more than that?

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: I think money is part of it. I think it would be wrong of us to say otherwise, but I think it also goes to how equipped or otherwise the educators feel to support a learning environment where you have children that might have complex or diverse communication and support needs, complex behaviours. We look at the workforce for the early childhood education and care sector, and we recognise that the level of expertise that they're really expected to demonstrate isn't met with a, sort of, commensurate recognition in terms of the wages that they're paid, and the respect that they're given within the community for just the challenges that the role can face. And so I think funding is part of it.

I think we could do a better a job of setting up our educators to support diverse learning environments. but it also goes to community as well and helping other parents and other children to really understand and embrace diversity and inclusion from a very young age, rather than setting them up for this, 'Well, they're not like us, we don't think that this setting is right for them'.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Our interpretation of the NDIS review talks about almost tiers of support, so mainstream – so specifically about children, and early-years children as the ambition in that report is to potentially find additional pathways, and to have those children included in those pathways. And clearly, early childhood education and care is – they don't actually say it, but it's very clear that that's one of those pathways.

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Their, sort of, terminology talks about more mainstream services and support, then they're talking about foundational support, and then they talk about either targeted and or therapeutic supports

for the children. Some children, well, their disability won't be diagnosed for a number of years, and so they will be participating in an early childhood education and care environment, and developmental delays and other things can be misinterpreted or missed.

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MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I was just interested in your thoughts around that tiering. Is that, in your view, the right structure for us to be thinking about what is important at the mainstream level in early childhood education and care? The foundational support feels a little bit like to us like inclusion support, even though there's concerns that we have, and we've raised, and other reviews have raised whether Inclusion Support Program as it currently is is sufficient. And then therapeutic or the targeted supports may well be appropriate in an ECEC setting, but also may be complimentary to, or delivered outside and perhaps, better delivered outside, I don't know, but I'm interested in your thoughts around that, I suppose, construct, and therefore potentially what that might mean in your mind for ECEC settings.

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. When the report came out, one thing that CYDA reflected on was the fact that we did feel that children and young people with disability were going to be significantly impacted by the reforms that were being proposed. And what we're left with at the moment is a sense of uncertainty in our community about what foundational supports will look and feel like for each child or each family. This has come through in some research that we've recently run. So if there's still time to provide the commission with additional information, I'd be happy to provide you with a summary of the results of a survey that we ran in February that specifically asked families of children with disability to reflect on the NDIS review.

30

And certainly, foundational supports came up as an area where families felt that if it worked well, yes. it's a good thing, but at the moment there's so much, I think, there's angst in the community that there's going to be reforms to the NDIS without these foundational supports being set up before that happens. And so in all of our advocacy, we're trying to make it crystal clear that before any large-scale, small-scale changes are made, we need to guarantee that there's no child who will be left without support. Early childhood education and care, I think, will form part of the foundational support strategy, and we're really keen to honour the commitment, I suppose, that the agency has been making that they're going to co-designing the reforms that are flowing from the NDIS review.

And so I think there's a real opportunity here for the commission and for the public to consider how – what information would be helpful for the public at the moment so that they can understand what foundational supports would look like for them, and then what changes we need to advocate for. We're in this funny period of uncertainty at the moment where we're, sort of, operating

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on not an awful amount of detail, but certainly what appears to be goodwill on behalf of the NDIA to engage in more consultation to design this properly.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Skye, I wanted to thank you for your statement and the materials you've provided to us. We were reflecting earlier that 12 months into the inquiry we're still hearing new ideas, and to me, some of the ideas that you presented to us are fresh ideas, and I just wanted to touch on a couple of them. One is your idea about embedding an anti-ableism framework within ECEC, and engaging – or, not us, but
10 recommending engagement in the co-design process with organisations to develop principles for use across the sector.

We've had other communities bring the idea of co-design in ECEC to our attention, but I don't think we've seen it in this way from your community.
15 I'm really interested in it. I know we're running out of time, but I'd just love to hear a little bit more about that one.

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And also about your recommendation that we bring the disability strategy and targeted action plan for early childhood into our inquiry. I'd just like to hear a little bit more about what that might involve and what it might mean.

25 MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. Skye speaking. Thank you. Great questions. Co-design is something that when done right, and when appropriate, can result in better outcomes for, not only service users, but for those that are funding services, and the broader community. When we talk about co-design at CYDA, we reflect on it as a process by which those
30 involved in a particular scenario are asked to contribute to the identification of what the issues are that we're trying to resolve, and then the strategies for resolving those issues. And they're included in that whole journey, and they're given authority to make decisions.

35 Co-design isn't always appropriate for every situation, and I think it does the process a disservice if you call something co-design when really it might be consultation, even if it is in-depth consultation. I'm really encouraged to hear that other sectors have approached the commission with this concept of co-design, because I think what would be really powerful in this situation is if
40 we did have a co-design process around designing, perhaps, the principles for ECEC, or other policy settings that the commission may recommend where this co-design process includes consumers.

45 So it could be families, and that those consumers represent, you know, the diversity of the Australian population, so people with disability, First Nations people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, but also the educators themselves. So the people that we're going to be asking to

5 support our children. Having them involved in the conversation, I think that would be quite a unique thing that happens. Quite often you'll see users or those involved in, sort of, receiving a service separated from those providing it, and I think that creates an artificial distinction to real life that they're going to be coming together in the end. So I would really support a move for co-design to take place in the setting with diverse stakeholders.

10 To the question about anti-ableism – sorry, sorry, you go. The question about anti-ableism, thank you for raising it. It's something that we're noticing as we're responding to opportunities such as this one by the Productivity Commission, that quite often we'll have wording in policy documents that may have inadvertently had more of a deficit focus. So thinking about children and young people with disability being vulnerable, you know, they're vulnerable because of their disability. It's not the disability that makes them vulnerable, it's society's lack of willingness, preparedness, or ability to create an inclusive environment in which they can thrive and feel safe.

20 And so by supporting a move away from this – and as I say, it can be inadvertent, but this blaming of vulnerability, or lower outcomes on the people who are experiencing marginalisation or vulnerability, we're not setting up frameworks in order to best serve those populations in the long run. So when we talk about anti-ableism, that's what we're referring to.

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you. And can I just quickly ask, has your organisation had an opportunity to engage in those processes of co-design in ways that would be helpful for us to know about?

30 MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. Absolutely. So one thing that we really pride ourselves on here at CYDA is the fact that when we run consultations and we develop our own policy positions, we do so in close-consultation with our community. In terms of co-design, we've run a number of co-design processes for projects which range from – at the moment developing some information that will support organisations around being child-safe. We've supported the co-design of resources around supporting families to understand the disability standards for education and educators.

40 So this is something that we're very adept at, and we've got some great processes here that we use for that, which centrally for us include ensuring we are centring young people with disability and their families in that process so that they're being, sort of, truly inclusive and reflective of the communities we're seeking to serve, and the changes that we're hoping to make.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you. Thank you very much, Skye.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We have a few minutes left, Skye, and I was interested in whether you had a specific view or comment around the Inclusion Support Program that's run in early childhood education and care.

But given we only have a few more minutes there might be some things that you haven't yet had a chance to talk about. So I wanted to put it back to you as an opportunity of, well, what's the most important and productive use of our time that we have remaining?

5

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. Thank you. Great question. We did make in our submission a number of recommendations concerning the Inclusion Support Program. I suppose, one thing that we would really encourage the commission to keep in mind is just the opportunity for funding for early childhood education and care shouldn't rest solely within the Inclusion Support Program. And in our submission, you will see that we've recommended that there be, perhaps, some conditions placed on services that do receive funding to support students or children with diverse learning needs having that funding tied to a requirement.

15

For example, that they have in place a disability access and inclusion plan, or some way that you're really requiring intentional reflection on the part of the provider on how they're providing inclusion, and if they're not, what they need in order to do that. I suppose that's where I'll leave my comments for now about the ISP. As I said, we do have some more in our submission but, yes, really happy if we've got time for another question, happy to take it.

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: No. That's fine.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. I think, at least from our side, Skye, I think we're very appreciative of your submission, and the input that you've had, and we'd like to thank you for your time today. And perhaps, we would like to take you up on the offer as well in relation to the survey work that you mentioned. There is time for us to take on board any insight that that would have, and I'm sure through one of my colleagues who are off to the left of me, you can't see, but you would have an email somewhere there to - - -

30

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. I do.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Please, feel free to forward that through. And if you did have any examples to, perhaps, Debs's point in question which is where you have co-designed specific policies in a single location, it would be good to see - - -

40

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Perhaps, the outcomes of that, or what that has – how that's manifested itself, and what product did that result in. So if there are some examples or an example that you'd want to share, we'd be very welcome to see that, so thank you.

45

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Yes. We'd love to, thank you. And if I can, I'll just be cheeky and just one more time reiterate the importance of disability not being siloed across government priorities, or policies or processes. In order for us to achieve full inclusion, we need all departments
5 to think that disability is their business, so thank you so much for providing us with this opportunity, and I really hope that it's been helpful.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: You're more than welcome.

10 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Absolutely. Thank you, Skye.

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you.

15

MS KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: All the best. Bye.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Daniel.

20

MR PINCHAS: Yes. Good guess.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Are you going to explain to (indistinct)?

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We will in a moment, but please, yes - - -

25

MR PINCHAS: You want me here?

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - come and sit up here. And perhaps, just for your benefit – well, it's not very formal, but we are taking a transcript which is why we need microphones, and that will be published in due course as we have for every other day. Very shortly I'll throw it to yourselves and you can, like Skye, make a comment if you wanted to, or a statement, or however, you'd like to use the time that we have available. We're very, very grateful that you have rearranged your time and come in a bit earlier today,
30 so thank you. I know it was relatively short notice, but your commitment to be flexible for us is duly noted and very much appreciated.
35

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: For your benefit, the name tags state, but I'm Martin Stokie, one of the commissioners responsible for the review into early childhood education and care. On my left is Lisa Gropp, and on my right is Deborah Brennan, so that's the three commissioners who are taking charge. We also have a number of our team here, and a number of our team online.
45 There may well be other people online. It's a public hearing, and so everybody is welcome to attend, but just for your benefit, we can't see who they are, and so I don't know whether (indistinct) online or not.

And perhaps, for those who are online, I'll just make the comment that following our discussion shortly, that will conclude the end of our formal schedule of meetings today. But we will have an opportunity for anybody who is online to raise any points that they wish. We will call for any
5 comments from the audience. With that in mind, could you just introduce yourselves, and make whatever statement you want, and then we can happily have our conversation as we go? We have some questions that I think Deb is going to put to you.

10

MR MISSON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct words.)

15 MR MISSON: Thank you. Okay. So Edmund Misson, I'm the acting Chief Executive Officer at the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership which I'll call AITSL from here on just to save us time.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Completely fine.

MR PINCHAS: Yes. Danny Pinchas, General Manager across Teaching and School Leadership at AITSL.

25 MR MISSON: Look, if it's okay, I will just make a brief opening statement. I just think it's useful to position, you know, our role in the sector, and some of where we're coming from on these issues.

30 So AITSL is a Commonwealth company that provides national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching, and educational leadership. Our vision is that Australia has a high-quality education system in which teachers and leaders have the greatest impact on the educational growth and achievement of every learner.

35 Early childhood teachers are an essential and growing part of the Australian teaching workforce. The early years of life are recognised as an important period for development and learning, and research highlights the contribution that qualified early childhood teachers make to outcomes for children in their school years and beyond. AITSL provides tools, resources and frameworks
40 that support teachers to enhance their practice underpinned by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The Teacher Standards are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality, agreed by all education ministers in December 2010. They underpin teacher registration across all States and Territories and provide a framework which makes clear the
45 knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers.

ATISL's remit in relation to the early childhood education and care sector covers early childhood teachers. We do not have a role in relation to other educators. All registered teachers in Australia including those early childhood teachers who are registered, are registered against the
5 Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The guiding principle for our work in the early childhood sector, is that early childhood teachers should be and feel fully included in the teaching profession. They are highly skilled professionals who do important complex work, and they should be supported to succeed. The support provided to early childhood teachers should
10 recognise their context, and the distinctive approaches to teaching and learning in the early childhood sector.

Efforts to provide support also need to acknowledge that many early childhood settings do not have the same level of supervisory infrastructure and access to a community of teacher peers that you would find in a school. Governments should consider this and ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to support teachers working across the wide range of early childhood settings, particularly during key transitions in their career, such as when they first join the profession as a beginning teacher, often after having
15 first worked as an early childhood educator, and when they progress from provisional to full teacher registration.
20

If we're serious about supporting early childhood teachers, we must provide access to all elements of professional support. This includes ensuring all
25 early childhood teachers are registered, providing them with access to mentoring and high-quality professional learning, and providing early childhood teachers with the opportunity and adequate support to apply for certification at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. One barrier to this that has
30 often been raised with AITSL, is that early childhood teachers do not feel that the language used in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is always inclusive of an early childhood teachers' practice and employment settings.

We believe that a review of the Teacher Standards is timely, and we would welcome a commission by education ministers to review and amend the standards to address this issue, among others that have emerged since they were agreed by education ministers in 2010. In this context, we welcome the commission's draft recommendations around improving registration
35 arrangements, support and mentoring, reducing barriers to upskilling, and contributing to professional learning for early childhood teachers and educators. Our response to the draft report highlights opportunities to expand upon these recommendations to further build and recognise the expertise of
40 early childhood teachers.
45

Early childhood teachers are teachers, and they deserve the same level of professional recognition, access to professional learning and support as their

peers in the school sector. So thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, and discuss our submission, and I'm very happy for questions or other conversation.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, thank you very much. I'm just listening to your punchy points there and thinking, tick, we've got that one, tick, we've got that one, tick, we've got that one. So what have we missed?

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: What have we missed? Yes.

10

MR MISSON: That's a good question. I mean, I might refer back to our - - -

15

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We are thinking about a, sort of, national registrations. We think that recognition of teachers appropriately – we're not talking about educators at the moment but we can - - -

MR MISSON: Yes. Yes.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And I'm interested in your thoughts. With appropriate mentoring and support that we have there, and it's probably even more critical in early childhood education and care - - -

MR MISSON: Absolutely - - -

25

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Given the nature of those - - -

MR MISSON: Yes - - -

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Are perhaps, more isolated than when you're put in a teaching primary school environment.

MR MISSON: That's right.

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COMMISSIONER STOKIE: We don't go into a great detail of detail about remuneration conditions. It's the whole package that we - - -

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MR MISSON: Yes. And look, maybe there are a couple of things I'd raise there. First of all, I mean, we, kind of, stay out of remuneration and industrial matters, but let's not pretend that's not important, and I think what that relates to is the attractiveness of the profession. And this is an issue we're grappling with across the teaching profession, you know, that the status of the profession is not high enough. That both commencements and completions of initial teacher education are down across the board from, say, 2017, 18, (indistinct), and that a lot of the public discourse around the profession is negative.

45

5 You know, and there's obviously a fine balance there between (indistinct)
employment issues. You know, of course, there are issues in workload, there
are issues of student behaviour, you know, we don't want to be naïve about
the issues, but at the same time we have to promote the benefits of, and the
rewards of a teaching career which are immense. So that's one thing that
perhaps, hasn't been covered so much. Another one that I did speak about,
but I might just highlight a couple of things. First of all, you know, I think
there is a live issue of the applicability of the Teacher Standards. And this is
a complex one because we're caught between the impulse to have one
10 teaching profession as we call it that, you know – early childhood teachers
should feel that they have the same status, that they're completely included in
the profession in the same way that any other teacher in any other setting is.

15 But at the same time, we have this consistent feedback that some of the
language in the standards is actually a barrier to that. So that is a complex
issue and, you know - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Is that - - -

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: So with examples of - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes - - -

25 MR MISSON: Yes. I think, you know, it's as – some of it is as simple as
there's wording like 'school' and 'classroom' - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay.

30 MR MISSON: -- student rather than learner (indistinct). And then some of it
is more fundamental where, you know, I think there's a view which could be
contested that the wording in the standards doesn't reflect the approaches to
teaching and learning in the sector, that they are too grounded in a curriculum
rather than the Early Years Learning Framework and so on. So that wouldn't
be a universal view, but it's feedback that we've heard and we can't ignore.

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. No. The workforce is the biggest
challenge in this sector. I appreciate it's not particular to this sector, but I
think it's maybe more acute, and I wonder if you had a view around – from
AITSL's point of view, there almost seems to be this competitive nature
40 which is that the universities are educating teachers which have a breadth of
age groups that they go for. The placement processes at least support them
going into primary schools, early childhood if they wanted to, but not
necessarily. The content of early childhood components of those degrees is
potentially being reduced.

45

It seems to be the direction of flow towards primary school, and I wonder as the body responsible for the registration and a whole level, does something need to be more structurally thought about here?

5 MR MISSON: Yes. I mean, I think there are a couple of aspects to that. One is I just think that dynamic does exist, and I think there are all sorts of reasons why you might think from the outside that a primary school is a more attractive working environment than – yes. There's pay - - -

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MR MISSON: But there's, I think, depending on the early childhood service, there's a potential for professional isolation and a lot of teachers who are the only teacher on the site. And I think that can be offset if that site is part of a larger group, but I think that actually needs a lot of thought in terms of support that's provided to those teachers.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

20 MR MISSON: And then, you know, the other one I sometimes hear is the hours. You know, that now school teachers report they're working long hours, but in terms of the actual contact hours with the children, a long day-care centre – it's called that for a reason, it'll be open much longer than a school, and more days a week, and more weeks a year. So, you know, there is that as well. I think there's something about the attractiveness. I think the positive thing that we've seen in some of our recent data is that the pathway for early childhood educators to upskill is really prominent.

30 So we've just done some work through our Australian Teacher Workforce Data project to try and separately identify degrees that are preparing, you know, birth to five, birth to eight, birth to 12, and we can send you a link, it's public. But probably the most interesting thing I got out of looking through that data is that for the birth to five degrees, 66 per cent of people are admitted on the basis of a vocational qualification. So presumably
35 99 per cent of those - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct) diploma.

40 MR MISSON: A certificate or diploma in early childhood, which I knew was a pathway. I didn't know it was that prominent. And the numbers are quite significant if you look at (indistinct).

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And are they coming through accelerated programs as well? We see some universities, Deakin and Wollongong, have, at least my understanding, they have accelerated programs that recognise the prior learning, the prior qualifications. And it might be from, say, one and a half years to complete the teacher degree, versus other universities where

they've almost changed the curriculum such that you'd have to do a postgraduate qualification to do an early-years – become an early-years teacher or - - -

5 MR MISSON: So we don't have data on that I don't think, but Danny's been doing some work on accelerated pathways, so - - -

MR PINCHAS: Yes. Not the data, but the same issue in the schooling sector as well, in terms of trying to find ways to make initial teacher education more
10 attractive, and less of a financial disincentive, especially for those mid-career changers. So since the move from a one-year postgraduate diploma to a two-year masters, universities, employers are looking for ways to blend that in with employment. You know, whether it's employment-based pathways, so you might have one year within the university, and then one year where
15 you're completing your initial teacher education program, but you're employed by a school or in an early childhood setting.

So that employment-based pathway is one, with the other option that universities are looking at is condensed programs which you've mentioned.
20 And for a post-graduate program, 15 months is about the minimum at the moment, but there are theoretically ways to even condense that further. And then recognition of prior learning, I think we put in our submission that there is another action, AITSL's not leading this, to really look at getting some national uniformity around recognition of prior learning because at the
25 moment it is, I mean, it still is under the discretion of the university or provider, but to have that as a more uniform, and more – I think, leaning in to not just qualifications as recognition of prior learning, but experiences which would blend in with a lot of the, I guess, para-professionals that work within early childhood settings, as well as - - -

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct) point there, and I think as you were talking my mind was coming back to it, and then you mentioned it, which is around harmonisation. It doesn't appear to me, but I think is a statement I'd like you to correct me if I'm wrong, which is there doesn't appear to be that
35 coordination. There isn't the coordination across the universities as to what is in the content. It seems to be university by university specific. I'll stand corrected. At least there isn't a uniform, you know, accelerated program in every state, and every university doesn't at least offer the same program. Not everybody's going to come through an accelerated program. Even if it's 66 or
40 60, there's still 40 per cent that aren't so you need potentially to offer both.

MR MISSON: Yes.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And so, yes. coordination of what constitutes accelerated or recognition of prior learning, and that might not only be certificate, it might actually be life skills and cultural backgrounds, and ways of learning which is critically important in particular communities and

particular cohorts of Australians, but the university divergence seems to be one where I don't – is there coordination? Who's actually taking responsibility for that? Or is that something that an EC Commission that we suggested could be established might have some input into and drive on?

5

MR MISSON: Yes. Look, I think it could. As Danny said, there's work underway. It's led by the Australian Council of Deans of Education to develop a framework for recognition of prior learning in initial teacher education. I would assume, but I actually don't know that that would extend to early childhood teachers. I would think it would have to, but there might be some more specific work that could be done, particularly around people who have a prior qualification in the field, you know, that just sounds logical to me, like, something that could be more standardised than say the assessment of life experience. There's always the case-by-case on this stuff. It depends on the structure of the RTO course and so on.

10

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MR PINCHAS: And probably, I think, in the schooling sector as a comparison, putting the independent sector, I guess, to the side, but there are less employers of, you know – number of employers in terms of eight States and Territories' government systems, in each one a Catholic education system, in each one an independent sector. And so what we're seeing in terms of innovation and in terms of employment-based pathways or recognition of prior learning and streamlining has been partnerships between employers and universities to get traction in this space. Similar things could happen in the early childhood space, but with, you know, more, you know, greater variety of employers, it's probably – that leverage point might be a bit more of a challenging - - -

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It's an interesting idea - - -

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MR PINCHAS: Policy point, but certainly that's where, you know, market power in terms of movement from universities to respond to employer needs, that's where we've seen the biggest gains.

35

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I suppose where I was going, we've recommended an Early Childhood Education Care Commission, overarching stewardship, et cetera. So if there isn't the countervailing capacity in the employment group, it's diffused and all the rest of it - - -

40

MR MISSON: Yes - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, the grand oversighting agency that has some authority to engage on these things could impact. Well, at least that's our thinking, and I'm testing that with you just to hear whether you think that that's the case or not.

45

MR PINCHAS: The other one, and again this was in our submission around Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers, is a similar argument. Where you've got large employers where, you know, for instance, early childhood settings within school settings, there's more availability of, you know, access to Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers. And, obviously, in the jurisdictions where you're registered and the teacher regulatory authority is the certifying authority, you have a pathway. But in terms of support and that being embedded, you know, if I'm a teacher in a single site, you know, single classroom – sorry, single teacher site, then it might be much harder to access that type of mentorship and support - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Well, by definition they (indistinct).

MR PINCHAS: They are the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Indeed.

MR PINCHAS: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: But you do raise an interesting point, because we've heard a lot around career paths, and people not just coming in at a particular level, doing that and then leaving, but seeing the opportunity to grow. And, you know, the leading teachers, and the remuneration that comes with that, and the recognition that comes with that, and the status that comes with that is something as to almost aspire to. And maybe it's then incumbent on us to think about, well, how would you do that in a single teacher environment if, you know, I'm being flippant when I say it, by definition, they are leading because who else is behind them or in front of them? When you're one, you're both winning and losing all at the same time. But maybe we have to think about how do you get the benefits of that career structure in a world that is differently structured.

MR PINCHAS: Yes.

MR MISSON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: I was going to ask about mentoring, because we've, you know, got a recommendation there about mentoring programs. But you've got experience of how these work, particularly as we were just talking about, when you've got dispersed educators and, sort of, how you link them? And we've also heard more broadly in the sector that the turnover has meant that a lot of experience has left the sector. So a mentoring program, you need to have a good mentors. And how do you deal with that?

MR PINCHAS: Yes. I mean, a lot of these issues are also in the schooling sector.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: Yes.

MR PINCHAS: But with much more, I guess, access to experience, especially in larger schools – I know schools are often larger, but the same things are issues in small schools. I think for mentoring we, you know, we have – that is also an issue that was flagged in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan under two areas, one, induction for early career teachers, but also for professional experience, so people on placement. And we're currently developing mentoring guidance to complement both our recently published induction guidelines, as well as the professional experience guidelines to come that ministers will consider later this year.

I think we are really keen to make sure that mentors cover all the dynamics of what teaching – the teaching skills and knowledge that are needed. Things like, you know, professional practice, because one thing we know from the research is mentoring, whilst it can be prevalent, is only going to have an impact when it's focused around practice, and has a good scaffold in place. Because you can have the, I don't know, for want of a better word, a more woolly mentoring relationship that makes the beginning teacher or pre-service teacher feel good in the space, but isn't necessarily going to lead to practice change, and therefore the efficacy that they have is diminished, and that's part of that retention issue.

So having mentors that are focused on practice is a really, you know, important part of what the research would say is effective mentoring. So that's, sort of, been a big part of our advice, and what the research has come up with, as well as looking at other things like well-being, orientation and professional identity.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: So would mentors be current serving teachers?

MR PINCHAS: Generally, yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

MR PINCHAS: Sometimes they would also have a leadership role within school settings. I think that that's where the challenge, especially if you're, you know, in a single teacher site – I know in Victoria through the Victorian Institute of Teaching, they've looked at how they can connect mentors from other settings when they're, you know – this was part of the issue that they faced when bringing in registration for early childhood teachers. They've got a very comprehensive mentoring framework - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Framework.

MR PINCHAS: - - - that they do – that they develop with employers, and just being able to offer that mentoring expertise, because you want your best mentoring so that you're learning from the best, and ensuring that expertise flows through, and those challenges of professional isolation just - - -

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: They're quite acute.

MR PINCHAS: Quite acute, and therefore more innovative solutions are required.

10

MR MISSON: Just to add to that, that's true about teachers. It occurs to me that this is a little bit like the problem of mentoring the principals though because, you know, by definition, there's one principal on each school site, you know.

15

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Right.

MR MISSON: And again, that in a systemic school that can work because, you know, there are people in regional offices who often are, kind of, the line managers of principals, and have had background – had been principals themselves, but, you know, there's a lot of use there of, say, retired principals. Now, you know, again, there's not an unlimited pool for retired early childhood teachers, but I – you know, maybe we do need to think a bit laterally where you've got that, sort of, very flat structure of the workforce, you don't, kind of, naturally have those levels of people to mentor and support. And maybe we need to - - -

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COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: You don't think they would - - -

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MR MISSON: - - - pull them in from outside.

MR MISSON: Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: It took me a bit of time to work out principals with p-a-l.

35

MR MISSON: Sorry.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Mentoring principals, I'm thinking, 'What other mentoring principles?' Seven ideas of – principles. Exactly. Anyway. Sorry.

40

MR MISSON: We are developing those, but that's a separate principle.

45

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Mentoring principles of principals.

MR MISSON: Yes. Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Exactly. Well, then that's an interesting – yes, so mentoring principals is an interesting example. In fact, I see some parallels between the educators – sorry, the teachers in some early learning centres, and almost being both the teacher and a mini principal.

MR MISSON: Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And we're not recognising them as such and the like, and therefore the skillsets is not just for teaching pedagogy, and the care, but also the operation of the organisation and the like.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I had a question though which was going back to your earlier point around reviewing the standards, and I wondered perhaps, – it might be unfavourable, what do you think would come from that? Is it just modernising the language so that it's a bit more inclusive and doesn't just refer to classrooms, and students, and everything that is a secondary or
20 primary school, and is actually inclusive? Or is there something broader there at play of exclusion of early childhood education? Is it going to the curriculum? Is it the play-based learning which is different from education-specific outcomes? What do you think would come from that?

25 MR MISSON: I think there is – I think that's – there is the language stuff which, you know, is a real barrier.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: No. No. Please don't. I'm not dismissing (indistinct words) really is important.

MR MISSON: No. But I think there is – there is a next level that is around play-based learning, you know, pedagogy, the nature of the curriculum. (Indistinct words) you'd probably find dozens. Even that point about the leadership role in relation to our educators, which I would say is underdone
35 in the Teacher Standards given the number of teacher aides and assistants and so on in our schools. I think is actually underdone in school Teacher Standards anyway. So it might be that you could still develop a single set of standards that were more inclusive of early childhood teachers, or you'd have, sort of, overarching in that, you know, there are all sorts of structures you
40 could have, but I think there is a level beyond just language.

And I also think some of that would flow back into the standards you want for school teachers, probably about leadership ones is one example. You know, working in a multidisciplinary team basically is one thing that might
45 be more prominent now than when those standards were first developed.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I'll ask a follow-up question, so please don't take offence to this, this is your chance to pitch, which is do you think you are the right people to do that review? You're not also responsible for the licensing regime in your review. Is it not – or is it because it's missing something there?

10 MR PINCHAS: Just to clarify, whilst we set and develop the standards, they are then agreed, and this is both for initial teacher education accreditation, registration framework, certification framework, standards, they're agreed by all ministers, so we're, in fact, the custodian. And then they're implemented by State and Territory regulatory authorities in the main, as well as employers.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MR PINCHAS: So I think there is already a degree of separation from the implementation.

20 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right.

MR PINCHAS: Whilst we support their implementation, we're not responsible.

25 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: But that would get - - -

MR PINCHAS: The questions - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: (Indistinct.)

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: (Indistinct words.)

MR MISSON: We would say that but, you know, I mean, we developed them originally - - -

35 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right - - -

40 MR MISSON: Back in 2010. They are known as the AITSL standards, although we dismiss that, certainly want the profession to own it rather than us but, you know, I think – I take the point about, kind of, checking our own work, but I think if it was developing new standards rather than, kind of, an audit of the standards and their implementation then I would argue actually that we're best placed to do that.

45 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Okay.

MR MISSON: I mean, particularly as we get into the early childhood sector and close collaboration with the stakeholders. We'd do that in schools too, but we know we have less background in that sector.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Because we're looking at all things that are going to improve - - -

MR MISSON: Yes - - -

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: The outcomes for educators. Not so much yourselves, but any teachers, so the sector, making it attractive. I think, you know, I've sort of picked that up, and I'm, kind of, envisaging some sort of promotion. What is the strengths? What's the advantages here? And there are a lot of advantages. It is a very interesting and engaging environment,
15 and it's one that could turn – if some of these elements were addressed in terms of remuneration conditions - - -

MR MISSON: Yes. And again, we talk about remuneration. We talk about, you know, horrible parents, you know, we talk about, sort of, all these things
20 which are real issues, but we cannot let - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Let's talk about that.

COMMISSIONER GROPP: We haven't talked about that at all.
25

MR MISSON: You're doing the right thing. You are promoting the profession which is brilliant. But, yes. I think we do just need to be careful how we talk about the teaching profession.

30 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: And are there barriers? Because from teachers who are teaching in primary school who might be well suited to moving into, and teaching, and want to move and teach in – and be teachers in the early childhood education sector, but for the remuneration conditions, et cetera. We've heard in one jurisdiction it's a one-way flow, if they move back down
35 they lose their registration.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Are you talking about teachers who've got -
--

40 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Teachers - - -

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: With appropriate – with the qualifications.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: They're registered and licensed to teach - - -
45

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: And saying what do - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: In one jurisdiction – you can't remove their qualification, but you can their registration to be enrolled and, therefore, teach and therefore work in a particular strata of the - - -

5 MR MISSON: I'm not sure about that example. One of our issues is that there are eight different regulatory regimes here.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

10 MR MISSON: And you would have heard about.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

15 MR MISSON: You know, I think the differences are greater in early childhood up to the point where many early childhood teachers still aren't registered, although there's agreement to go down that path. I think anecdotally, there are probably mainly barriers for people who are primary qualified which, I guess, is an issue for the early childhood sector to think about. You know, obviously, the ideal situation is to have an early childhood
20 qualified teacher in every setting. Whether a primary qualified person, you know, should – there should be fewer barriers to making that transition I think is a – it's a question the sector might want to consider. But I haven't heard of that specific example.

25 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Does the expansion of preschool services envisaged by different jurisdictions, Victoria and New South Wales explicitly, and other jurisdictions who are considering it, does that exercise your mind? We're potentially going from a doubling of preschool hours of a
30 four-year-old, and an expansion in a particular provision. It's not like there isn't a level of early education and care at those age groups of three and four-year-old, but an expanding – of which they would be because they're state-based, they would be state preschool teachers.

35 MR MISSON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: At three and four year old. Does that exercise your mind at all? Where's that coming from? How's that going to run? How's that work? Any of those things or is that not your questions?

40 MR MISSON: We're fortunate not to be responsible for all those questions.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Right. Okay. Well - - -

45 MR MISSON: But I think – I think two - - -

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - I think that's expressed of this side of the table there.

MR MISSON: Two – two – two things. I think two sides to that. First of all, it's an immensely positive development, right.

5 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MR MISSON: You know, and once you're going down that path, you want highly qualified, skilled professionals teaching those children.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MR MISSON: Of course you do. It does land in a context of workforce pressures.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes.

MR MISSON: In the school sector, and as you've said, aside from some regulatory barriers, it's, kind of, like one labour market. So it is going to create further pressure in that labour market, which is why I think the
20 upskilling piece is just so important. Because you have a pool of people there who are – well, already skilled, used to working in early childhood settings, you know, you can, sort of, go and out and try and promote yourself to school leavers which is great, or career changers, but you've actually got a pool of people there. So I think that's critical. You've then got to replace
25 them, of course, but probably the barrier to entry of that is lower.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. I've pretty much exhausted my set of questions.

30 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: (Indistinct).

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Was there anything else that you wanted to raise with us that we haven't touched on, that you read in our report that you thought or we should know?

35

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Maybe they got that wrong.

MR PINCHAS: I think maybe just to – no, just on the – coming back to the standards and reviewing them from an AITSL perspective. You know, since
40 they were agreed back in 2010, there's been a number of issues from different sectors, different evidence and research has emerged. And so whilst, you know, you've obviously got an early childhood focus and that's one of probably the major issues that needs to be reconciled. I think we'd want to – because they are so well embedded across so many areas, we'd want to do it
45 once properly across – you know, a proper review. Now, that might be out of the Commission's scope, but I think it's just to recognise – so, for instance, it's worth pointing out that the recent Royal Commission into disability has a

recommendation there for education ministers to commission a review of the standards in relation to a human rights approach to disability education. So there's a few pieces that I think AITSL would see as coming together.

5 COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Being together, yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: That's a fair point, yes.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: It is.

10

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: I presume you'll appreciate when I say at least at the same time we wouldn't want to have a focus that was around early childhood education and care given the challenges and given the focus and given the potential growth that got subsumed or lost within a – or delayed as part of a broader – so I take your point which is, you know, do these things well, do them properly. At the same time, we want to see it focused.

15

And I'm not quite sure, but I was hearing maybe there's almost a very dedicated component of the standards that is calling out rather than absorb in together and inclusivity, it's actually calling out this part of a tiering of the, I don't know whether there's a difference, for argument's sake, in primary to secondary school in the standards, and if there was then it kind of would lend itself - - -

20

25 MR MISSON: It's not.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: - - - to be another sort of tiering, or that might be anathema. So you'll have the (indistinct) anyway - - -

30 MR PINCHAS: But I think there are possibilities there, as Edmund said, that you could have something that is overarching, inclusive, and then have more dedicated elaboration or standards that speak to those. Because those issues, yes, primary, secondary subjects, specificity, the extent to which it specifies pedagogy, they're all things that I guess are an issue when you're trying to create one holistic set of standards.

35

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Yes. And the needs in the sector are very acute now, and so notwithstanding cleaning up the standards, fixing the standards, modernising the standards is going to be an important part, and also thinking about things that need to be done today or tomorrow. Other than that, Lisa?

40

45 COMMISSIONER GROPP: No. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BRENNAN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you very much for your time.

5 MR MISSON: Thanks.

MR PINCHAS: Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: Thank you for rearranging your schedule to come a little bit earlier.

MR MISSON: That's all right. We made it.

15 COMMISSIONER STOKIE: For those that are online, that concludes our formal scheduled meetings for today. I'm happy to call if there is anybody online that wish to raise any comment, reflection, I'll be silent now. Well, I think that speaks volumes. So thank you very much for everybody's attendance today. I'll draw to a conclusion our hearing today.

20 We are scheduled to recommence on Thursday morning. And so if you wish to continue to engage and watch, we look forward to seeing – or hopefully you look forward to seeing us again. We'll have another complete set of stakeholders and interesting discussions. We thank everybody for joining today. Have a good day.

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MATTER ADJOURNED

[4.14 PM]