



14 February 2024

Inquiry into Early childhood education and care  
Productivity Commission

Dear Commissioners

I am writing in response to the Productivity Commission's draft report, A path to universal early childhood education and care.

Further to our submission (attached, Blaxland et al., 2023), we would like to respond to three specific requests for information in the draft report.

**Information request 2.3: Functioning of the Inclusion Support Program in family day care**

We draw the Commission's attention to page 10 of our submission. Our research has found that family day care services no longer try to apply for Inclusion Support Funding because they have determined that they will never successfully meet the funding criteria. In this regard, the Inclusion Support Program does not provide effective support to Family Day Care services.

Family Day Care services decide not to apply for funding because of previous experience in having applications fail, not because of the adequacy of the Top Up. This is not to conclude that the Top Up is adequate, but rather its adequacy has not been well tested, having so rarely been granted.

**Information request 9.1: Scope for broader funding reform**

In response to information request 9.1, we support the Commission's consideration of supply-side funding, and draw attention to pages 10 and 11 of our submission, in which we argue that a needs based, supply side funding model would better meet the needs of services operating in low socio-economic areas and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In addition, we recommend that such funding be available for capital works, so that ECEC services, particularly those in high poverty contexts, can create adequate space to cater for the needs of neurodiverse children and others with high learning support needs (Skattebol and Aminpour forthcoming).

**Information request 7.2 : 'System navigator' roles in the ECEC sector**

Our research suggests that 'system navigator' roles, or brokers, play a critical role linking families to services. Some families require considerable support to understand the Australian ECEC system of services and subsidies, to source necessary documents such as birth certificates and immunisation records, to find a suitable service, to pay a bond and to enrol their children in a service. Our research with services operating in low socioeconomic areas (see our submission, Blaxland et al., 2023: 7) has found that many families also need support connecting to other services for housing, health needs, disability diagnosis etc. Services can struggle to provide families with the support they need under current funding

models. Cultural brokerage is also important to develop trust, understanding and cultural safety in services.

Our research, *Five Aspects of Engagement in Early Childhood Education and Care* (Skattebol Blaxland and Adamson, 2021; Skattebol, Adamson and Blaxland, 2023), provides a detailed investigation into brokerage organisations. We found that these services provided critical support to link families to ECEC services, and also eased the work of ECEC services in areas where families had high information needs. A 'system navigator' could sit with a parent and support them while they completed an application for Child Care Subsidy, for example, a time-consuming task most services cannot offer to most families. Unfortunately, however, despite successfully increasing ECEC participation, the location and funding of 'system navigator' supports is *ad hoc*. It would be greatly beneficial to undertake national investment in system navigation.

Yours sincerely,

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## References

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Skattebol, J and Aminpour, F (forthcoming), Catering to the needs of neurodiverse children in education settings, *Environment and Planning*.

Skattebol, J., Blaxland, M., & Adamson, E. (2021). *The Five Aspects of Effective Engagement in Early Childhood Education: Approachability, Acceptability, Availability, Affordability, Appropriateness*. Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre.  
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