

To whom it may concern,

I attended the ECA session hosted tonight on zoom regarding the current inquiry as conducted by Prof Deb Brennan, and as such am putting this submission forwards on behalf of the services who may not have a voice otherwise.

I am an early childhood teacher who has over 20 years' experience in the sector and transitioned over to consultation and training in 2016 after identifying a gap around the amount of accessible and affordable support there was available to services.

In my role I have had the honour to travel all across Australia and work with a vast array of services and see a vast array of quality levels. I am aware of the fact that those services who often put their hand up, or their voices forwards, for opportunities to further advance the sector are those who are a well oiled machine with a culture of high quality practices, research, and excellence. This is not the only version of early childhood education and care and I feel compelled to advocate on behalf of those services who are unlikely to have a voice in the inquiry otherwise.

A large number of services are doing their best to keep their head above water and there are a number of factors contributing to this. The following are the common issues in services who are struggling to maintain compliance, let alone exceeding level practices:

- Poorly trained educators who have a lack of general skills and knowledge necessary for completing their work to a satisfactory level, across all levels of ECEC qualifications. There is a large gap between how assessments are conducted to mark a student as competent, and what this looks like in the 'real world' when you have longer than 2 weeks to get to know children, their interests and plan around these.
- Lack of leadership knowledge or skills allowing those in leadership roles to guide and mentor educators, and build their professional skills and knowledge. Many new university graduates are expecting they will not need to do anything beyond pass on instructions and run group time, often refusing to change nappies or serve meals, let alone provide mentoring and role modelling to the team.
- Inconsistent approaches by regulatory officers during spot checks leading to services feeling disheartened and unsupported, rather than guided and informed. Gone are the days where you formed a relationship with your officer who was only a phone call away, now there is often a sense of intimidation and fear, and you may not see the same person twice.
- The well documented and universally impacting staff shortage in ECEC, with many educators leaving the sector as they are not feeling valued and

respected by their employers, or are mentally/emotionally/physically burnt out. Casual agencies have run out of staff as a daily occurrence, those who are coming for interviews are often unemployable and services who have high expectations are needing to employ 'the best of the bunch' instead of 'the right fit' to maintain ratios. This then impacts the overall quality of their services as it has a flow on effect for culture and compliance.

- Those in management roles in many small independent services are barely keeping their service operational - Many nominated supervisors/approved providers are also working full shifts on the floor in rooms or in the kitchen, then still needing to complete the day's admin when they get home. This has been going on since 2020 and cannot be sustainable for much longer. Many owner/directors of small standalone services are ready to sell, and many community based services who rely on management committees cannot get volunteers so are closing their doors as they do not know what other options are available to them.
- Systems that seem to be set up to penalise the sector instead of support it - for example educators on visas need to do farm work as part of their application, whereas other professions, such as medical or school teachers, are allowed to do remote work to support small communities within their profession, this would also support the remote communities that cannot find staff to have some relief, and potentially even find a permanent employee.
- Services are so focused on all of the 'added extras' that are constantly shared with them in line with best practice and current research that this is distracting them from basic day-to-day compliance as they feel compelled to 'keep up'. So many services have let basic safety and hygiene practices slip as they are distracted by other areas such as displays and sustainability.
- Unregulated ECEC social media groups that are negatively impacting the culture and sharing dangerous misinformation within the sector as many educators take what they see in the posts as fact. They are also impacting the culture within the sector as many posts are complaints or starts an inappropriate assault on the someone's practices instead of boosting and championing each other.
- Pressure to pay 'competitive' wages with large organisations that have the capitol to support their wages, which small independent services run by passionate and caring individuals having to refinance their homes to be able to staff their services.

Most people who I come across in services are really trying to do their best and do what is right but there are so many barriers in their way that it is an uphill struggle every day. These are the services that I advocate on behalf of and want to get their voices heard and considered in the inquiry to ensure that any decisions and outcomes are achievable for all and support each service to make positive improvements.

Should you require any further information, including individual submissions from any of these services, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will work them to get this through to you in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Rachel Rooke - BEd(ECE), MEdLead:EC