

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry –Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

A lot of work has been undertaken in the last decade demonstrating the importance of early childhood education. Studies and research from across the globe demonstrates the importance of quality education and care in the 0-5 age bracket, and demonstrates that it continues to have positive impacts in adult life. In fact some researchers (Frank Oberklaid) indicate that if we were to put more money into the 0-5 age bracket we would see decreases in adults in prison, welfare and the need to support as many people with mental health issues.

Australia has taken huge and important steps in progressing the quality early childhood agenda. We now have a transparent assessment and ratings process which motivates centres and shares with the public the quality of education and care. It is important for all children in all areas to have access to the best quality learning and development opportunities, and actually research demonstrates that it is even more important for children from low socio-economic areas.

Please do not take away the quality of education and care for those who most need it. We have taken such positive steps – don't throw it all away for the sake of a few dollars. We wouldn't decrease funding in our schools because it costs too much- why would we do it in our early education and care centres. We wouldn't suddenly tell Principals they didn't have to hire trained teachers- they could just get anyone to help out... These are important years of life and they influence our whole lives. In deregulating the system you don't impact on the high and middle class- you impact outcomes from those from low socio-economic backgrounds- for those children who need it most.

Have you experience difficult accessing suitable care?

No. There are a lot of different services in our community including Long Day Care and Family Day Care. We had no trouble accessing the service of our choice. As we were new to the area My Child website was extremely useful in searching for centres in our area. The new Standards and Rating process will be very useful for parents trying to search for better quality childcare- and to incentivise centres to provide better quality education and care.

I do realise some people may have an issue getting into the centre that they want. Maybe local govt should be mandated to provide ECEC much like state govt has to provide schools.

What factors influence whether you use early childhood education and care services?

My partner and I value quality education and care and thought that having a place where our child could experience other positive adult role models, have a safe place to socialise with other children and have someone who is committed to his learning and development was extremely important. Our key factor was QUALITY.

We do not have family members who can care for our child on a consistent and ongoing basis. Both my partner and myself work part-time. Obviously cost plays a part but both my partner and I were amazed at how affordable child care is with the child care rebate.

Families now spend thousands of dollars on new cars and new technology- we are a materialistic culture. It is up to the government to incentivise good evidence-based practice and encourage people to have access to quality education and care. Not to subsidise poor quality care arrangements so that people can spend more money on big tvs. Education is important, important things often cost money (look at university).

Quality of different ECEC Services

As we were new to the area and the Quality and Standards Assessments had not been completed on the majority of centres in our area we had to rely on word of mouth to get recommendations for Centres in our areas. Now however the majority of centres have a Rating which would be very useful in guiding you about centres.

We would pay more for a quality learning centre as quality is the key factor in childcare that we value. However our childcare (a not for profit) demonstrates that you do not have to have an expensive childcare to provide quality. Our childcare is one of the cheapest options in our town and just received an 'exceeding' rating. We would not accept a lower quality care and would go further and pay more to get it.

Problems with access to, or the flexibility, cost or quality of ECEC preventing you from undertaking work or study

The length of our long day care (7.30am- 6.00pm) is a perfect amount for even those who want to work long hours. There are lots of options such as Family Day Care which can provide a flexible/cost option to fit in with work/study.

Support for Families

The current support for families is very adequate. We were actually surprised about how much the government provided. However there is a need for better pay for staff (see below). The process to access support is reasonably straightforward- it could be more user friendly and straight forward (better internet access/support).

Should support be extended

No. This is like asking should we pay people to home school their children as a way to decrease costs in education. Children need social interaction. Children need education and care. Studies have demonstrated that quality education and care prior to school produces better outcomes and benefits into adult life. eg EPPE Would nannies have to have certain degrees and certificates?

I would encourage local govt being mandated to provide ECEC much like state govt has to provide schools to all children over nannies being funded.

Are you living in a regional or remote area

Yes- we live in a regional area. We don't have any access meeting our ECEC needs. There is an issue around the consistency of quality however the ratings and assessment process currently underway is working towards addressing this.

Appropriate pay for early childhood educators

It is important that given the work expected of early childhood educators that they are adequately remunerated. Like teachers where the government pays their wages or provides a large amount to private providers- it is important the early childhood educators receive an increase wage reflecting the importance of education children.

Research shows that the education, learning and development experiences from 0-5 are perhaps the most important of our life, and that investing in this age group we would be able to decrease costs of prisons, welfare and mental health costs. In recognising the need for quality in early childhood education and care we need to adequately pay the people who are providing the service.