

NSW Children's Services Forum

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Who we are

The NSW Children's Services Forum consists of NSW state-wide specialist organisations representing or supporting non-profit community based early education and services. These include peak organisations, resource agencies, co-ordinating bodies and large not-for-profit early education and care providers.

Members who support this submission are: Australian Community Children's Services (NSW Branch) The Benevolent Society, Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW), Contact Inc, Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS), Ethnic Child Care, Family & Community Services Co-operative Ltd, KU Children's Services, Mobile Children's Services Association Inc, Montessori Australia Foundation, Network of Community Activities, NSW Family Day Care Association, Occasional Child Care Association, SDN Children's Services, UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families and UnitingCare Children's Services.

What is this submission?

This submission has been made directly to the Productivity Commission Inquiry, but in addition all signatory organisations are including it in their individual organisational submissions to the inquiry. Combined, our organisations represent the majority of peak organisations and large providers in the early education and care sector in NSW. We hope, in view of this that the Productivity Commission considers these statements within this context. Please see footnotes.¹

NSW education and care² In NSW around:

- 207,000 children attend long day care services
- 42,000 children use family day care or in-home care services
- 2,500 use occasional care
- 53,000 attend preschools
- 100,000 use outside school hour care services.

There are around:

- 2,500 long day care services
- 140 family day care services and in Home care services
- 40 in home care services
- 1300 outside school hours care services
- 800 community based preschools and 100 NSW Department of Education preschools
- 60 mobile (out of scope of NQF) services (long day care, preschool, occasional care)
- 90 occasional care services

Excluding preschools, 250,000 families use these services.

¹ In this statement we have defined early education and care services to include out of school hours care services.

² www.docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/child_care_early_learning_in_summary_march_quarter_2013_0.pdf and www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/statistics-and-research/public-reviews-and-enquiries/review-of-nsw-government-funding-for-early-childhood-education/review_nsw_gov_funding_ece.pdf

Overarching Focus

We request that the focus of the findings of the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report be on the rights of all children in Australia to access quality early education and school hours care rather than the workforce participation needs of their families.

A large body of evidence exists that shows:

- Children learn more in the first five years of their life than at any other time;
- That children who access quality early education and care perform better academically at school;
- Investment in early education and care delivers high economic returns;
- Access to early education and care ameliorates educational economic disadvantage;

Evidence also exists that access to quality outside school hours care benefits children.

To ensure that each child in Australia gets access to high quality early education and care, we believe the following changes need to be made to our existing Australian early education and care system:

1. Adoption of a best practice model of early education and care by all states and territories.

- NSW has a proud history of provision of integrated education and care in centre based early childhood services. This was made possible by having the same regulatory requirements for all centre based education and care services for 0-5's regardless of where they lay on the education and care spectrum. This has meant that most children have their early education and care planned by a university qualified early childhood teacher. Research shows that this increases quality of early education and care.

2. Retention of the NQF

- Considerable investment by both the early education and care sector and all levels of government has already been made into the National Quality Framework.
- The National Quality Framework was based on sound and extensive evidence about the factors that impact on education and care quality and was developed after extensive consultation.
- We are committed to maintain the current timelines for qualifications and ratios in centre based services and levels of quality identified in the NQF because these are based on this evidence.
- We believe that current out of scope services (eg mobile services and occasional child care services) should be resourced to be brought into scope of the NQF as soon as possible.

3. A better system of planning for early education and care

- There needs to be a more targeted approach to provide and fund services rather than relying on market forces. The market tends to leave gaps in service provision (children with additional needs, babies, children in remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, economically disadvantaged and other vulnerable and at risk children).
- Increased opportunities for community based providers to establish and expand including access to funding mechanisms to restore a balance in the provision by for profit /non for profit providers.

4. Reform of the way we fund early education and care services

- Establishing a nationally consistent system for state and federal subsidies for all education and care services which are in scope of the National Quality Framework (including preschools and kindergartens) to ensure affordability for families.
- Increased investment to support quality provision in all education and care services.
- Ensuring that if funding is expanded to additional services that this be in done with funding in addition to that currently available from the existing funding envelope.
- Consider moving from the current system of parental subsidies through CCB and CCR to a system which funds services directly.
- Build into this funding system funding to support the full inclusion of children who would otherwise be excluded at a rate that does not economically disadvantage the service by their inclusion.
- Combines all funding for early education (e.g. National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education and State and Territory Government preschool and education funding) and childcare into the one funding “pot”.
- Ensures that priority of access guidelines do not exclude those children who would most benefit from access to early education and care.
- Taking action to ensure the ongoing financial viability of home based educators in NSW to enable all providers to continue resourcing and supporting educators to meet NQF requirements.

5. A sustainable early education and care workforce

- Improve professional standards by expanding ACECQA's role to include early childhood teacher degree curriculum development and approval.
- Mandate professional development pathways for all educators.
- Ensure access to professional learning in the areas of leadership and management as foundations for improved professionalism and increased effectiveness as a sector.
- Recognition of the increased responsibilities and professionalism of educators, as well as the importance of early education and care to children needs to be reflected in increased wages and better conditions.
- Development of career paths.
- Ensure adequate incomes for home based educators to enable the attraction and retention of educators within the family day care and in home care sector.