

Dear Productivity Commission,

Writing to you to hopefully encourage you to continue with the work which has been put in place so far for Early Childhood in Victoria I am however glad for the opportunity to discuss improvements that could improve even more so Early Childhood where Australia could hold the benchmark for other countries around the world and create a place where quality Education starts at birth. Where it rightl should be.

I have 2 roles that are affected by these proposed changes; firstly I am a mother.

My thoughts as a parent

My son attends childcare 3 days per week. I am totally impressed by the hard work and dedication that the ladies have who educate and care for him. They are not only 'carers' but better described and respected by the term 'Educators'.

To further respect the work they do it is imperative that we demand better education for the people who look after our most precious assets – our children.

To further respect our Educators I ask that they have far better pay than they currently have to keep the wonderful people working with children and reward the great work that they do as they are caring for our future and we owe them that importance. This will also look to attract other talented professionals into the Early Childhood Sector.

Furthermore taking away conditions and pay from staff is belittling and highlights that this importance for our children is not respected.

Children are better cared for when the ratios of child to teacher/ educator are low.

Less children to a suitably qualified adult equals better interactions, more time for each child, less stress for the Educators and more enjoyment for children and educators.

I feel that needing to undertake a review into this puts children at an unnecessary risk. This will waste time of the sector unless it is for better outcomes overall where conditions are made better for the children and educators not worse.

I want my son to have access to his educators whenever he needs them. Not to have him waiting because we think that more bums on seats is a better option for parents or is more lucrative.

As a parent:

I would be extremely disappointed if I was having to send my child to a service where the staff did not have to have qualifications that they do now, we are so used to now having qualified professional Educators who are proud of their achievements. Reducing this whether it be for Family Day Care, kindergarten or Childcare is a back step for the early childhood sector and the quality of care for our children.

I would also be horrified if the rooms should at any stage be made to have more children (infants room for example) to a staff member 1:4 is more than enough for young children, really it should be less (1:3) for better quality than that and not being drawn back because it costs too much. That is absolutely ludicrous and lessening the quality of the services we have fought so hard to maintain the quality of.

My child has had access to childcare at a local community kinder. The staff have more than enough to do with settling upset children daily without having the stress of more children and less staff to make it harder for all involved. There should be more educators to care for the children. And qualified Educators at that, standards need to be maintained or bettered not lessened.

Another concern is that he may not have access to a 3 year old kindergarten program in day care if I continue to work. There are hardly any three year old funded programs delivered by qualified teachers being offered in childcare. This is desperate and needs to change, as all children need the opportunity to access these programs as it is crucial for their development and later success in life. See studies discussed further... oecd study and Abecedarian approach information.

More money needs to be spent on educating teachers and other educators on effective teaching strategies see and giving staff the resources to spend more time with the children to give them effective interactions that promote learning (like the Abecedarian Approach). And the most important ages are birth – 5, - EARLY CHILDHOOD!

High quality services need high quality resources and funding. And that is the bottom line!

Secondly I work as a Kindergarten Teacher...

My service is a sessional kindergarten run by a council

We have 1 teacher to 15 children 2 staff members to up to 30.

The benefits of the improved ratios in the NQS would mean extra time per child if lessened to 22 max. which is going to make a huge difference to the amount of time shared around per child. Also a decrease in the admin necessary to provide for 28 or more children, enabling teachers like me to spend more quality time on a better program with better outcomes.

A huge focus needs to be on incorporating at risk families into more kindergarten programs – both 3 year old and 4 year old. Studies confirm that if intervention is in early childhood it can enable children who are at risk to have more chance of succeeding in life. The earlier we can get these children into education – 3 year old or 4 year old kindergarten, a long day care setting and/ or a sessional kindergarten would be beneficial to improving their future success.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/rs/rs5.html>

see also a E4Kids study finishing in 2015:

http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/E4Kids/news/pdfs/E4Kids_National_Brochure.pdf

Children with additional needs also require greater focus:

In kindergarten the new 15 hours accessibility of a program for 4 year old groups means that children who are Additional needs funded will also need increased funding for up to 15 hours if necessary to improve their access to a kindergarten program. This is crucial for children to have the opportunity before formal learning to access a kindergarten program and it is beneficial to additional needs children and other children to have these children access the program.

Promote Quality Professional development for the Educators and Teachers...

I am particularly interested in the Abecedarian approach to children and learning and find the studies fascinating where it also stresses the importance of inclusion in Early Childhood Education with children who are vulnerable and/ or at risk families. At the same time continues to hold benefits all children regardless of background/ culture.

The Work that Melbourne university is doing for children is amazing and should be more readily available for Teachers and Educators to learn about and use in their training. It discusses the importance of the quality of interaction with the children and has specific training for all staff, teachers and other educators to undertake to raise awareness of how their interactions create learning in young children and how to develop and increase learning opportunities with the children.

see also a E4Kids study finishing in 2015:

http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/E4Kids/news/pdfs/E4Kids_National_Brochure.pdf

Research clearly tells us that high quality programs and properly trained Educators give the best outcomes.

<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322232.pdf>

It is very important that vulnerable families have their fees funded. Not enough yet are making the most of this – and or the three year old programs on offer.

- I am a parent. I am a kindergarten teacher: trained with two degrees. I aspire to future learning. I love my job. We deserve acknowledgement of the work we do with the children. We need desperately to up our public image from 'carers' to Professionals. And be clear about the differing levels of Educators, not just retain the one confusing umbrella. All are important and necessary but we are all have differing backgrounds and qualifications.

- It has been amazing the pride from kindergarten assistants and childcare professionals where they have been encouraged to study and obtain their certificate for the benefit of themselves understanding their role better and in turn allowing for benefits for the children in their care.

The staff I have witnessed are even more enthusiastic in developing good quality programs for the education of children and are more serious about their job and career. Parents are recognising our training more so. Our co-workers are becoming more involved in assisting in the delivery of the educational program, and children are having better interactions with staff because of this.

Professional development has had some amazing opportunities of late and I namely speak of the Bastow courses available to staff. I was blown away by the quality given and the education delivered by such reputable universities and scholars and was so proud of my profession and inspired to do more training, and want to go back to university to study again myself.

- Part of this inspiration has been to further understand the NQS. I have never seen so much pride taken in providing for our services accountability and also allowing staff to demonstrate what we do to better our delivery – this has inspired learning and further training for us all. Not upped prices and work load – but given us a benchmark where before there was none.

This important for the future of the industry. We need the NQS to maintain the standard and keep it across the board.

Because of the NQS we have been connecting with other services to assist us in delivering better practices. Through teachers meetings, online discussions, professional development.

To better support children's transition to school I would think that providing a government funded three year old kindergarten program delivered by a trained kindergarten teacher where possible.

And incentives to assist in the delivery of the quality programs to assist staff in giving adequate time and conditions in which to do so such as...

Maintaining decent and better wages for people in the sector – teachers and other Educators

Ask for proper qualifications before entering : Cert 3, Diploma/ Grandfathering or acknowledging relevant industry experience, but also encouraging more education to up the professions status and the quality for our children.

Continue with such wonderful opportunities for all staff to promote better interactions between all educators and teachers and children. Like the Abecedarian approach, through opportunity to partake in Professional Development to promote these skills in people working with all age ranges but specifically those under 3.

Develop proper mentoring/ leadership programs for staff on all levels.

Encourage networking as part of the job and dedicate time to do this within paid hours so all are able to attend

Maintain funding opportunities to develop current facilities and provide new opportunities for better infrastructure to accommodate for universal access, considering services with decent sized offices and lunch rooms, proper kindergarten spaces for funded programs, 3 and 4 year old programs within and separate from childcare.

Additional needs funding to match the 15 hours kindergarten programs. And money spent on having quality additional needs assistants to assist in the programs for both child care and kindergarten programs

Approaches that can help at risk families and all children are approaches like the Abecedarian Approach which Melbourne university is focussing on at the moment to provide better quality programs for children. Please focus on these kinds of studies and places where we have proven success studied by experts in Early Childhood.

Yours Sincerely

A concerned member of the public